CONTEXTUALISING St.RAMALINGA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TAMIL SOCIETY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis entitled "**CONTEXTUALISING St. RAMALINGA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TAMIL SOCIETY**"" is a bonafide record of the research work carried out by Thiru. K. Pandiyan, under my guidance and supervision for the award of Ph.D. Degree in History in the Department of History, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli during the period 2008 - 2009 and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, dissertation, thesis, associateship or any other similar title to the candidate.

This is also to certify that this thesis is an original, independent work of the candidate.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**CONTEXTUALISING St. RAMALINGA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TAMIL SOCIETY**" has been originally carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. N. Rajendran, Dean of Arts, Professor and Head, Department of History, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, and submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History in Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli is my original and independent work.

(K. PANDIYAN)

PREFACE

The present thesis has been the realisation of a long felt desire on the part of the Researcher to study the pre-Nationalist phase in Tamil nadu with a view to identify the basic factors which contributed to or prophesied the specific course of events during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During the course of research, beginning with a study of the Non-Brahmin Movement, there was the startling revelation that the course of events contrasting on the critique of Brahmanism and Brahmanical culture had their actual roots in a unique movement sponsored by a unique personality grounded on the soil among the rustics who neither knew the east nor the west but were themselves the *pacis* (hunger). The study of the modernisation process had thus led to that of de-humanisation. The proposed over all survey of the socio-cultural situation had inevitably led to the study of a personality in the historical context. Paradoxically, St.Ramalinga mostly remained untouched in terms of historical contextualisation as also the movement sponsored by him. The original manuscripts had to be dispensed with and every thing had to be re-written. Hence the present format. The Researcher, at the outset, would remain indebted to all those who had effected the transformation.

First and foremost, the Researcher would thank the Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappallli and the Vice-Chancellor **Dr.M.PONNAVAIKKO** who could understand and solve the problems of the College teachers pursuing research.

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The Researcher has had a multi-disciplinary framework and the Researcher had to enlist the support of the scholars belonging to various Departments, especially Tamil, Economics, Sociology, Culture, Religion, Philosophy, Psychology, Sanskrit and Political Science. Especially, the Researcher records with gratitude the discussions he has had with **Dr. S.Ramamurthy, Dr.Y.Vincent Kumaradoss, Dr.V.Ramasamy Dr.Suryakumar, Dr.S.Seshasayee, Prof.K.Kaliayamurthy and S.Gunasekar.**

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- ❖ St.Joseph's College, Trichy.
- ❖ Tamil University, Tanjore.
- ❖ Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai.
- ❖ Connemara Library, Chennai.

- University Library, University of Madras.
- Maraimali Adigal Library, Chennai.
- U.Ve.Sa Aiyar Library,Chennai.
- NM&ML, New Delhi.

Copies of the Un-published Ph.D theses referred to in the present thesis have been lent by the scholars concerned and the Researcher would remain indebted to them for the kind gesture. Thiru **V.Valavan** has provided the practical assistance to the Researcher.

The sons of Researcher M/s. P.Prithivi Raj and P.Abinand have helped him to have access to the '**e**' resources. The researcher would offer special thanks to **Mrs. P.Thendral Pandiyan** for all her encouragement and cooperation.

Transliteration has been a difficult task. Many local language registers have had to be incorporated. The Researcher would thank all the language scholars who have extended a helping hand in this regard.

The Researcher would be thankful to **Mr.K.Srinivasan**, who had typed out the original manuscripts and brought out this format in diligent form.

The researcher dedicates the thesis to his parents [Late] **Mrs.G.N.Lalitha** and **Thiru.S.Kandasamy.**

K.Pandiyan

CONTENTS

Abberivations:

A.I.U.T.T.A.	All India University Tamil Teachers Association
BKP	Bala Krishna Pillai
CLS	Christian Litrary Society
Kazhagam	Thirunelveli Saiva Siddhandha Publications
LNC	Loka Natha Chettiar
NCBH	New Century Book House
O.U.P.	Oxford University Press
RPM	Ramalingar Pani Mandram
S.S.A.Nilayam	Samarasa Sanmarga Aarrachi Nilayam
SMK	S.M.Kandasamy
SP	*Sundaram Pillai*
SPCK	Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of Gospel
SSSS	Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam
TVM	Tozhuvur Velayutha Mudaliyar
U.Ve.Sa./U.V.S	U.Ve.Saminatha Iyer
UA	Uran Adigal
UTS	United Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

A Unique Personality

Shaping the required historiographical perspective for studying the nineteenth century Tamil Society has been quite challenging, for much fragmentation and compartmentalisation have been explicit in the colonial historiography, distorting the truth and at times negating the whole truth. While the developments during the century were so complex as to enable the authors of the twentieth century movements of varying socio-political contents to trace the respective origin from one of the nineteenth century movements, the latter have neither been studied in depth nor in inter-relationship. Two crucial guidelines would help shape the necessary perspective. First, K.N.Panikkar, while evaluating the unique contribution of D.D.Kosambi to Indian historiography, has observed that it was a contemporary reality that culture had emerged as a "very intense site of struggle" and stressed the need for a genuine concern for the "historical totality with culture as an integral element", the inadequacy of which has led to the communal appropriation and imperialist hegemonisation of the field[1]. Secondly, Romila Thapar, while justifying the historians who were trying to understand the dynamics of different periods and communities without assuming a kind of static past which was the behest of colonial scholarship, has observed that the

[1] K.N.Panikkar, "Culture as a Site of Struggle", *The Hindu*, 27 Jan. 2009, p.9.

historical analysis was "really about an entire society with an accounting of different levels" and the way in which they were inter-related or integrated and how those relationships had changed over time[2]. Put together, the two views would focus on an entire society in motion and in its historical totality with culture as an integral element.

The two major movements of the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu which could influence the twentieth century socio-cultural and politico-economic movements were the movement of the modernisors and the *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* movement of St.Ramalinga. While the modernisors have been, and are being, quoted freely and widely with reference to the twentieth century developments, Ramalinga has not been properly studied with reference to language modernisation, educational reform, women's empowerment, religious reform and social transformation with a holistic perspective. In an article entitled "The Awakening in Tamil Nadu" [*Tamil Naattin Vizhippu]* published in *SwedesaMittiran* [Tamil Daily] in 1918[3], C.Subramanya Bharathi was the first to identify St.Ramalinga as one of the pioneers of the new awakening of the Tamils. That was the view of the nationalist poet. Eugene F.Irshick in his work on *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s* has referred to the publication of the selected hundred verses of Ramalingaswami's *Tiru*

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[2] Romila Thapar, "Conversations about History", *The Hindu,* 23 Jan.2009, w.edn. 2, p.1.

[3] C.Subramania Bharathi, [Sakthi Dasan] "Tamizh Nattin Vizhippu" [The Awakening in Tamizh Nadu], *Swedesamittiran,* 25 Jan.1918, p.3,col.4 -5.

Arutpa: Aaraam[Sixth] *Tirumurai* by the *Kudi Arasu* [1929] owned by the Self Respect Movement and the accompanying statement in the *Kudi Arasu* journal of the said movement that what all the Self Respecters said in those days had already been said by Ramalingaswami many years earlier[4]. Evident it was from the two references cited above that Ramalinga was a unique personality with a total perception that the two major contending movements of the twentieth century Tamil Nadu could derive their descent from his mission and vision.

Uran Adigal, the biographer and editor of the works of Ramalinga, has compared the latter with *Sekkizhar,* the author of the Saivite *tottira* work par excellence *Periya Puraanam,* having been an author, a literary elucidator, teacher and spiritual *guru.* Besides exhibiting the profile of a multiple personality in being an editor and a journalist, Ramalinga happened to be the exponent of a trait, an advocate of Siddha medicine, reformer, a poet of divine wisdom and, above all, a divine personality himself.[5] He has assessed that Ramalinga was a pioneer to conduct *Tirukkural* classes for the common people, promote adult education, sponsor three language [Tamil-Sanskrit-English] School system and do research in epigraphy.[6] Ramalinga, according to him, had his own

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[4] Swami Chidambaranar, *Ramalinga Swamigal Paadal Tirattu* [Selected Verses of Ramalinga].Chennai: Kudi Arasu Press, 1929.

[5] Uran Adigal (ed.), *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi* (1972; 2nd ed. Madras: Ramalingar Pani Manram,1981), pp.50-54.

[6] Ibid., p.53.

philosophical tenet, founded a *marga* for that tenet, established a *Sangha* for that *marga* and founded a flag, a slogan and an assembly.[7] Nothing was an exaggeration and none else belonging to the nineteenth century could be found to have ever contested to attain that unique status.[8]

The Movement

The basic fact as revealed from Uran Adigal's assessment has been that Ramalinga (1823-1874) sponsored a 'Movement' called the *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* Movement. It had ceased to exist after the founder's mysterious disappearance in 1874.[9] But taking into consideration the contemporary reality that many non-Brahamin families, mostly belonging to the *Padaiyatci* or *Vanniyar* community and living in the former undivided South Arcot, Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu, prefer to name one son as Ramalinga, and another son or daughter as *Jothi* and ceremoniously attend the *Tai Pusam* day [a festivel]at *Vadalur* every year as a cult practice, one should premise, by historical re-construction, that the movement was originally planted among the small farmers. The definition

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[7] Ibid., p.54.

[8] For a consolidated list of Tamiil Scholars of the Century, see Myilai Seeni Venkataswami, *History of Tamizh Literature: 19th Century* (Tamil) (Madras: Alagappa Puthaga Nilayam, 1962).

[9] Ramalinga himself had wound up the activities of one of the four institutions he had sponsored namely ***Sathiya Gnaana Sabhai*** in 1874; it was re-opened in 1878 for worship, but the purpose was gone as was regretted by Thiru.Vi.Ka. in 1929; Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* (1971); 2nd ed. Vadalur: S.S.A.Nilayam, 1976), pp.526-527.

and role of the small peasants in social change has drawn much critical attention in recent times. What was certain was that the movement launched by Ramalinga had definite historic significance and relevance. That Ramalinga had left *Cenna Pattanam,* [Chennai] negated *Chidambaram,* and finally settled at *Vadalur* on the lands donated by the people for whom caste and hunger went together making them sign *Paci* for *Padaiyatci,* [a caste] would strengthen the above premise.[10]

An Enigma for the contemporaries

Unique as he was, Ramalinga had remained an enigma for many of his contemporaries. He was not youthful in the worldly sense while he was a youth, as a result of which his friends had parted company with him.[11] He got married but did not lead a family life.[12] He had become a reputed scholar in both Tamil and Saivism but had the least inclination to avail the status of a professional drawing respect and reverence. He was poor but did not seek patronage under anybody or any institution.[13] Those who could not meet him were of the opinion that he was only semi-literate; but once they developed personal acquaintance, they could immediately understand that Ramalinga was not a mere scholar of

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[10] Uran Adigal, *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit..., pp.493-500; '*paci*' meant hunger.

[11] Uran Adigal (ed.), *Tiru Arutpa -Aaraam Tirumurai* (1972; 2nd ed. Madras: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981), verse 3404:1-3.

[12] Ibid., verse 3452.

[13] *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit......., Letter No.6, p.369

eminence but a man of very high wisdom.[14] Even those who preferred to defame him had turned tight lipped after an encounter as was the case with Arumuga Navalar (1823-1879).[15] He was religious but had opted for intervention in worldly affairs as against seclusion.[16] Besides, he preached non-conformity.[17] He was spiritual but quite sensitive to the problems of the material world. He was great but never liked people calling him great. He was a leader but those who were led by him could not see any insignia of power which the others would exhibit with pomp and glory.[18] In a letter to a person of unknown identity, he had stated: "All those who have assembled here, have come to exercise power. You are poor like me. Be in isolation and be careful."[19] Being poor and acquiring power were, according to St.Ramalinga, were polar phenomena. He ate little, covered the entire body to avoid giving a 'fatty' look and cared the least for the rich.[20] When the question of attending either a solemn religious function or the death demanding distress of a

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[14] Ibid., pp.32-34

[15] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit......., pp.455-457

[16] During *Karunguzhi-Vadalur* life (1858-1870), Ramalinga had begun to make social interventions. He intervened on behalf of the poor and helpless people in matters of grief, debt burden and police harassment; *Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit......., 3400:4, 3420; *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit......., **Letters**: to Rathina Mudaliyar, No.16,31; to others No.3; from the others to Ramalinga No.7.

[17] Non-conformity to organised religion, *varna, kula*, caste, religious disputes and rituals and codifications were advocated.

[18] Ramalinga silenced a yogi with humility when the latter identified him as a **Noble man**; he did not like people calling him ***Periyavar*** or **Great Elder**; he firmly recorded dissent when he was addressed as ***Ramalinga Swamy***; when his name had been printed as ***Arul Prakasa Vallalaar***, he even ridiculed himself; the controversial title *Tiru Arutpa* was only the making of his disciple; Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit......, pp.60-61, 324, 327; *Tiru Arutpa – Aaaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit......, verse 3400: 2-3.

[19] *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit......., **Letter** to Others, No.10.

[20] *Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit......, verse 3397, 3461; *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit......, **Letter** to Rathina Mudaliyar, No.6.

harassed family arose before him, he resolved it in favour of the latter.[21] It would be pertinent to refer to the view of Suddhanandha Bharathi that "Ramalinga continues to be unknown to the Tamils."[22]

The Paradox

The varied recognition accorded to Ramalinga during the nineteenth century was reflective of the contemporary state of affairs. Ramalinga at Madras was welcome as a *Vidhwan* or *Pandit* and more so as a vociferous exponent of Saivism and Hinduism. He could communicate with the Mutts in that capacity. Veda Nayagam Pillai (1826-1889) was pleased to obtain in 1858 a dedicative verse from Ramalinga for his *Nidhi Nul* [Book of Ethics] which was first published in 1859. The *Sasthra Vilakka Sangam* requested him to publish *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam* (1854). Ramalinga's skill in *tarka* and *vadha* [Logic and Debate] had attracted many towards him. Maha Vidhwan Meenakshi Sundharam Pillai (1815-1876) was explicitly vocal in exalting his emergence as a *Vidhwan* with such accelerative potential as to render many like him and Arumuga Navalar (1823-1879) redundant.[23] But the curtains had fallen and everybody stood stuck to their positions tightly once Ramalinga settled at *Vadalur* in South Arcot District. Only a few scholars and Saivites would then interact with him. Neither the Maha

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[21] *Urainadai Pagudi,* op.cit......., **Letter** to others, No.3.

[22] Kungiliyam PL. Shanmuganar, *Dayavu Uruva Arulaala Tamizh Maganaar* (1987; rpt. Madras: Vallalar Gurukulam, 1989), p.45.

[23] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit......., p.438.

Vidhwan nor Veda Nayagam Pillai preferred communications with Ramalinga though the latter had come nearer.[24] The exponent of Saivism and the friend of the Mutts, Arumuga Navalar, attempted in vain to defame *Arutpa,* the songs of grace, as *Marutpa,* the songs of delusion.[25] While the elite response had dwindled, the popular reception had grown as the people had begun to address him in reverence as *Periyavar* meaning 'great elder'. U.V.Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942) strangely had not been acquainted with any of his works. V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar (1870-1903) had not made any mention of Ramalinga in his review of contemporary developments in Tamil.[26] The greatest paradox was that the *South Arcot Gazetteer* should have bothered to record the demise of that *Paradesi* and made the observation that he, all along, had advocated **burial as against cremation** [emphasis mine].[27]

Historical Significance

For a historical researcher, the Four institutions which Ramalinga zealously sponsored – *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangha* (1865), *Sattiya Dharma Saalai* (1867), *Siddhi Valaagam* (1870) and *Sattiya*

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[24] Ibid., p.169: That Veda Nayagam Pillai went to Vadalur along with the Maha Vidhwan and obtained the approval of Ramalinga for his work *Sarva Samaya Samarasa Kirttanaikal* as has been reported as a here say must have been an untruth, for the said work was published in 1878, four years after the disappearance of Ramalinga.

[25] Ibid., pp.455-457.

[26] V.G.Suryanarayana Sastriar, *History of the Tamizh Language* (1903; rpt. Madras: Kabeer Printing Works, 1953), pp.120-127 (Tamil).

[27] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit......, pp.624-626.

Gnana Sabhai (1872) – would *prima facie,* indicate that he was experimenting with different strategies to launch a popular movement. What was clear was that Ramalinga had no faith in empty rhetoric and he was a person with the firm belief that the truth of a statement lay not in what the mouth uttered but what the hand did. He was a philosopher who not only interpreted the world in a particular way but attempted to change it. The first impression after a preliminary study of Ramalinga's works would be that he has been mostly reviewed from the vantage point of spirituality to reality whereas he had actually proceeded from empirical premises to ideological comprehension and from there back to reality with a view to change it. It would then be understood that the study of the author and of his movement shall have to be conducted not in isolation of one from the other, or merely together, but as a dialectical process. The present study is an attempt in this direction. How far critical scholarship has contributed to developing a proper perspective in this regard could be evaluated by the review of literature concerning Ramalinga. Such a review should also bring to light how far the critics of Ramalinga have exonerated themselves of the charge of V.S.P.Manickam that "We hide' we are afraid to speak, and to say it further, we do injustice to *Arutpa*; we keep something within and speak out a different thing."[28]

[28] K.Vellai Varanam, *Tiru Arutpa Cinthanai – Preface* quoted in Kungiliam PL.Shanmuganar, op.cit., p.45.

Review of Literature

Ramalinga study was inaugurated by his disciple, Thozhudur Velayudha Mudaliyar, with his *Tiru Arutpa Varalaaru* in verse, appended to the First Four *Tirumurais*, published in 1867. It was only a humble beginning for the future development of Ramalinga criticism in three phases.

The Introductory Phase lasted for four decades from the 1920s to 1950s. The affirmative phase comprised of the 1960s and 1970s. The Movement phase continued since 1980s. The stress has varied and based on it, the status of St.Ramalinga has also varied. The phases are only hypothetical since one could point out the overlapping and contraplacements with reference to the allocation of the works. In this part of the study, selected works of the three phases would be reviewed after providing the list of major works concerned.

In the twentieth century, the inauguration for Ramalinga studies was held with the publications of *Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Kirttanai* [Hitorical Notes on Ramlinga Swami] (1923) in verse, and *Tiru Arutpa* (1924) in a single volume both by S.M.Kandasamy Pillai.[29] The *Samarasa Sudha Sanmarga Sangha* (SSSS) edition of *Tiru Arutpa* was subsequently released in two volumes. The twelve volume edition of the work by Bala

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[29] For the publication details of the works refer to hereinafter, see Bibliography.

Krishna Pillai (BKP) had commenced in 1931. Along with these M.S.Kandasamy Mudaliyar's *Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Kurippugal* [Historical Notes][1923, 1924], T.S.Balasundaram Pillai's *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaarum Tiru Arutpa Aaraaycciyum* [History and Research on Ramalinga Adigal] [1930], Pandithai Asalambigai Ammaiyar's *Ramalinga Swamigal Caritham* [1934], T.V.G.Chetty's *Sri Chidambaram Ramalinga Swamiji: His Life, Mission and Studies* (1935), Swami Suddanandha Bharathiyar's *Arul Cudar Vallalaar* (1940), Suddha Sanmarga Sangam's *Tiru Arul Prakasa Vallalaar Divya Carittiram* (1955) and Thiru.Vi.Kalayna Sundaranar's Presidential Address (1935) in *Ramalinga Swamigal Tiru Ullam* (1955) constituted the first phase. Chidambara Swamigal's *Chidambaram Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Curukkam* (1963) could very well be added to this list. During the first phase, St.Ramalinga was projected as a divine personality with divine wisdom whose theory of *Sanmarga* symbolised ahimsa or non-violence. The trend coincided with the then prevailing ethos of the Gandhian era first and those of the post-assassination era next. It was almost an introductory phase in the study of Ramalinga, for, after his disappearance, the movement had started showing signs of decline, the Nationalist Politics had come to the forefront, that the Subramanya Bharathi (1882-1921) era had begun to sweep the ground with the hurricane winds of patriotism and that *Swaraj* and 'Gandhi' had become the new *Manthras* for every mouth, the

name of Ramalinga had almost receded to the background to such an extent that S.Vaiyapuri Pillai could not include him as one of the 'sparkling Tamil diamonds' in *Tamil Cudar Manigal* (1949)[30]. Whether Ramalinga's cause got assimilated into the Nationalist paradigm or eliminated would be a real starting point for contemporary history, dealing with independence.

The second phase in the study of Ramalinga comprised of the 1960s and 1970s. Bala Krishna Pillai's publication of the 12 volume series of Ramalinga's works was completed in 1961 and the Uran Adigal edition [UA] was released in 1972 and 1978. The second edition (RPM) of the latter was published in 1981. The two decades were marked by the eruption of an economic crisis, sweeping political changes in independent India and the wider prevalence of the debates concerning alternate theories of national development, social change and political ideologies. The stage was affirmatory in the sense that there arose the re-discovery of St.Ramalinga, with every contending group deriving strength by 'owning' him or elaborating his philosophical tenets in their own way.

P.Mutharasu's *The Life of Ramalinga* [1961], M.P.Sivagnanam's *Vallalaar Kanda Orumai Paadu* [1962]; N.Vanamamalai's *Tamizhar Panpaadum Tattuvamum* [1963]; A.Srinivasa Raghavan's *Oru Nurrandu*

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[30] S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamizh Cudar Manigal* (1949; rpt. Madras: Pari Nilayam, 1968). This must have been due to the embarrassment caused by Kadiraivel Pillai who was mobilising the Tamil scholars against Ramalinga under the pretext of defending the Tamil *bakthi* tradition.

Tamizh Kavidhai [1970]; Uran Adigal's *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* [1971]; T.Dayanandan Francis' *Ramalingaswamy* [1972]; SP.Annamalai's *The Life and Teachings of Ramalinga* (1973); S.R.V.Arasu's *Voice of Vallalaar* [1974]; G.Vanmikanathan's *Pathway to God Trod by Ramalinga Swamigal* [1976]; M.P.Gurusamy's *Vallalaar: Or Arimugam* [1977] have been the representative works of the second phase. Through these works Ramalinga became known as a Hindu reformer, Saivite humanist, Renaissance thinker of the Nationalist tradition, a spiritualist unique and sublime, one who struck sympathetic vibrations with Christianity, the *Sanmargist* with non-conformity, a utopian socialist and an advocate of *Sama Dharma*[equality].

The third phase of Ramalinga studies has been the contemporary phase commencing from the 1980s. The shift in focus has been from theory to practice, from individuals to social action groups, from incidents to phenomena and from orthodoxy to ideological critiques. The stress has been on Ramalinga's movement and the perception of his conceptual framework as the socio-political and cultural-ideological framework of that movement, not in cause and effect relationship, but as holistic paradigm. Social theories have made significant advance in explaining movements and phenomena. Antonio Gramsci's concept of Cultural Hegemony, Paul-O-Freire's Theory of Conscientisation, Edward Said's approach to the 'text', Mao's analysis of the agrarian class

structure and the various theories of the peasant movements have made significant in roads into modern historiography.[31] Much light has flowed on Ramalinga's movement against the backdrop of contending theories on social change and movements. Since the third phase has been an ongoing phase, an exhaustive list of critical works could not be provided. In the chronological critique of the works made in the forthcoming pages, the selected works of the third phase would be reviewed to vindicate the trends in the encapsulation of St.Ramalinga's *Sanmarga* Movement.

The representative personalities of the first phase were S.M.Kandasamy Pillai and Thiru.Vi.Kalyana Sundara Mudaliyar. The former's *Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Kirttanai* [1923][Biographical Notes on Ramalinga] in verse was the pioneer work to cover the life of St.Ramalinga in its entirety. Certain informations like Ramalinga receiving Saivite initiation or *Diksha* at the age of eight could be traced to this work alone. To him Ramalinga was the invocatory God. The *Kirttanais* [in verse] were translated into prose (1923, 1924) under his supervision by M.S.Kandasamy Mudaliyar who, on his part, had added many miracle episodes to project Ramalinga as a divine personality.[32] Pandithai Asalambigai Ammaiyar's work (1934) was only the elaboration

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[31]Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Paul-O-Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (New York, 1964); Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (ed. Trans.), *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* (London, 1978); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London, 1971).
[32]M.S.Kandasamy Mudaliyar, *Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Kurippugal*(1923,1924;rpt.Vadalore: Samarasa Sanmarga Aaraaycci Nilayam, 1970).

of the *Kirttanais* in prose. Porayar Chidambara Swamigal's work (1963) also reflected the trend but the reliance was on the internal evidences for the first time.

For Thiru.Vi.Ka., Ramalinga was a divine Saint with intense spirituality.[33] The latter was believed to have propagated caste transcending wisdom and sponsored the *Sattiya Gnana Sabhai* at Vadalur with a view to creating a model temple emancipated from caste domination. It was unfortunate, Thiru.Vi.Ka. felt, that great persons were remembered in worship while their ideals stood defeated. According to him that was all the more true of Ramalinga's movement also.

M.P.Sivagnanam, the veteran freedom fighter, popularly known as *Ma.Po.Si* had been a vociferous writer throughout his life in upholding the vision and mission of St.Ramalinga and he was the first to present the latter as the pioneer of the Nationalist movement. His *magnum opus Vallalaar Kanda Orumai Padu* [1962] was the first attempt to define the place of Ramalinga in the social, cultural and political history of the Tamils.[34] The eighteenth century armed revolt of the polygars was crushed by the British with the superior arms and the polygars could not arouse the people on a broader platform as they were caught in the vicious circle of religion, community, *varna* and caste. In the twentieth

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[33] Thiru.Vi.Ka. Presidential Address in *Ramalinga Swamigal Thiru Ullam* (Vadalur, 1955), p.34.
[34] M.P.Sivagnanam, *Vallalaar Kanda Orumai Paadu* (1962; rpt. Madras: Poongodi Pathippagam, 1998).

century there arose a mass uprisal against the British under the unifying label of the Nationalist movement. This was the case almost in all the Presidencies, and behind the twentieth century mass uprisals lay the spiritual reform movements of the nineteenth century which had unprecedentedly contributed to the spiritual unity of the people cutting across religion and caste. St.Ramalinga's *Sanmarga* Movement was a 'Spiritual Unity Movement' in that direction. For Sivagnanam, the concept of the 'spiritual unity of the souls' or *Aanma Neya Orumai Padu* [Unity of Souls] was the central prescription in Ramalinga's ideological framework. Also for him, Ramalinga was uncomparably honest in disowning his own earlier writings as having arisen from a lack of knowledge. The change in attitude, according to him, had occurred in Ramalinga owing to his exposure to the bitter realities of life.

The Marxist approach in the 'sixties and' seventies' of the twentieth century was quite orthodox. History was viewed unilaterally in terms of the industrial productive forces. For N.Vanamamalai, in *Tamilar Panpaadum Tattuvamum* [Tamil Culture and Philosophy] [1963], Ramalinga was a romanticist and a utopian socialist who derived solace from a future bliss as well as in a justful past.[35] For K.Kailasapathy in *Adiyum Mudiyum* [The End and The Beginning] [1970], Gopala Krishna Bharathi's [1785-1875] *Nandannar Carittira Kirttanai* [1861] deserved

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[35] N.Vanamamalai, *Tamizhar Panpaadum Tattuvamum* (Madras: NCBH, 1963).

critical scrutiny as it revealed the tyranny of the 'Thanjavur Brahamin' landlords but not Ramalinga's works, making a crusade against the caste system.[36] Most probably the scholar could have been influenced by the Arumuga Navalar approach in respect of Ramalinga. The Modernisor centred approach negated the peasant question and branded the religious poets as reactionaries.

A.Srinivasa Raghavan in *Oru Nurraandu Tamizh Kavidhai* [1970] [Tamil Poetry of a Century] had made a Subramanya Bharathi oriented retrospective ordering of the nineteenth century Tamil works by using the symbols of bud, flower and fruit.[37] For him, Bharathi was the writer sans equal of Tamil renaissance and Nationalism and hence those who had been predecessors to him were only lower in the hierarchy. The concept was quite significant that its impact on Tamil critical scholarship has survived into contemporary times.

Uran Adigal's *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* [1971] has, by far, been the most authentic study of St.Ramalinga's biography.[38] His other works in this direction have only been supplementary in presenting the processed information from this work. The author, himself being a *Sanmargist*, has been quite objective in portraying Ramalinga's evolution as a *Sanmargist* in five stages. These have been 1.childhood [1823-35];

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36 K.Kailasapathy, *Adiyum Mudiyum* (Madras: Paari Nilayam, 1970).
37 A.Srinivasa Raghavan, *Oru Nurraandu Tamizh Kavidhai* (Coimbatore: Mercury Putthaga Company, 1970).
38 Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit.......

2.Adulthood [1835-1858]; 3.*Karungularm* life [1858-1867]; 4.*Vadalur* life [1867-1870]; 5.*Mettu Kuppam* life [1870-1874]. The five stages have been labeled as *Kanda Kottam* life, *Orriyur* life, *Purva Gnana Chidambaram* life, *Uttara Gnana Chidambaram* life and *Siddhi Valaagam* life respectively. For Uran Adigal, Ramalinga's conceptual framework had a separate identity and the *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* philosophy advocated by him was a new paradigm. Uran Adigal had meticulously collected the information regarding Ramalinga available from the biographical sketches in the earlier editions of *Tiru Arutpa*, the internal evidences from the original manuscripts, the letters of Ramalinga to others and those of others to Ramalinga, the then available critical studies, the South Arcot Gazetteer, *Brahma Gnana Sangam* records and all that had come by oral tradition. Some of the oral traditions were reliable while some were not. Uran Adigal had accepted both types without using the yardstick of corroborative evidences.

M.P.Gurusamy's *Vallalaar Or Arimugam* [An Introduction to *Vallalar*] [1977] has been typical of the second phase of Ramalinga studies.[39] The author owed his approach to Thiru.Vi.Ka. in matters of spirituality and to M.P.Sivagnanam in matters of reform. For him Ramalinga's greatness lay not merely in the spiritual transformation which he underwent in personal life but in the valuable path he had laid

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[39] M.P.Gurusamy, *Vallalaar: Or Arimugam* (Madurai University, 1977).

for the progress of both the individuals and society. He has stressed the need for studying the specific socio-political conditions in which the personality of Ramalinga took shape. According to him, Ramalinga had to swim against the tides and he was not for the *status quo*. While the need of the time was to inspire the people in terms of love for the mother tongue and the study of its great literatures, Ramalinga was ahead of the times in inaugurating a new era in Tamilology. The author has chaptered almost all the areas in which Ramalinga had made an impact. For him, Ramalinga's spirituality was directed towards the restoration of human values.

K.Vellai Varanam's *Tiru Arutpa Cinthanai* [Kazhagam, 1986] was the first attempt to encapsulate Ramalinga's writings within the framework of saivism. For the author, all had been stated earlier and nothing was new nor deviant. Ramalinga had only restated what had already been stated but with firmness and sense of ordering. Kungilium Pl.Shanmuganar's *Dayavu Uruva Arulaala Tamizh Maganaar,* [The Great Tamilian of Grace and Mercy] originally a research article presented to the Sixth World Tamil Conference [1987] and later published as a book [1989], has portrayed Ramalinga, in precise terms, as a Saivite revivalist.[40] Those that would be identified as the 'deviant characteristics' in Ramalinga's philosophical framework have been explained by the

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[40] Kungiliam PL.Shanmuganar, op.cit.......

author as the original tenets of Saivism. The concept of *Sanmarga* was already there and Ramalinga had added the prefix *Suddha* **to make it 'new'** [emphasis mine**].** Further, Siva and Saivism had earlier attained the prefix; Ramalinga patternised the Saivite philosophy by extending the same to *Sanmarga* too. *Sanmarga* originally meant 'defeating *Kaala'* or 'God of death'; birthlessness was conceived as deathlessness; but the concept of mortality of the human body had deluded people and disfigured the original meaning of *Sanmarga*; Ramalinga revived it with his concept of *Sanmarga* as doing away with death. *Sanmarga* leading to the life of deathlessness had earlier been conceived as *Peru Neri* [the great way] as against the *Siru Neri* [the crude way], inseparable from 'worldly existence'; 'Education for deathlessness', *Mokhsa* as the state of existence without birth and death' or non-dichotomous with materiality and spirituality; and feeding the body to feed the soul-were the essential components of *Peru Neri*. Not having been explicitly stated as a concept with due stress and having failed to generate popular comprehension, the concept of *Peru Neri* was re-shaped by Ramalinga as the way to attain the 'Sublime life without Death' (*Maranam Ilaa Peru Vaazhavu*). To show it anew he had defined it as the end of Vedantha itself [*Vedantha Antha*]. Ramalinga started adhering to the *Peru Neri* at Madras and ended with the advocacy of the 'Sublime life without Death'; the beginning and the end were the same; he was only one of the plantain trees that had grown

from the roots that were, and are, in existence as a continuum. Yet the author has finally agreed that there always existed an inability to explain many components of Ramalinga's conceptual framework.

The extreme view of St.Ramalinga as a Christian convert was expressed by Rev.S.Lawrence of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in a booklet [1988] incorporating his lecture at the Theological Seminary at Madurai.[41] For him, Ramalinga's search for truth had commenced in 1858 when he left Chennai and ended in 1872 with the announcements in *Perupadesam* [1873] [The Lengthy Sermon]. Ramalinga's self assessment made him reveal the fact that his intellect was earlier at a'low ebb' only, that he had then attained a 'huge profit' and that he had been 'raised to heights unreached till then'. In the opinion of the author, Ramalinga, by then, could severe all his links with Hinduism because of his changed faith in Christian revelation. The reference to God as *Arul Perum Joth Aandavar* [Supreme Lord of Grace and Light] and *Tani Perum Karunai* [Supreme Unique Grace] were of Christian origin. *Jothi* or light was only inanimate by tradition and it personalised God in Christianity alone. To substantiate his hypothesis, the author has referred to the spread of Christianity at *Chidambaram, Cuddalore* and *Nellikkuppam* and the probability of Ramalinga having had discussions with the Danish

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[41] S.Lawrence, *Ramalinga Adigalum Kiristuvamum* (Madurai, 1985).

Mission priests who were by then working among the downtrodden in those areas.

In an unpublished Ph.D. thesis entitled *The Emergence of the Peasant Agrarian System in Tamilnadu and its Impact on the Nineteenth Century Tamil Renaissance and Modernisation Trends* [1989], S.Ramamurthy has attempted to explain Ramalinga's life in terms of the 'search for identity' covering two distinct phases.[42] During the first phase [1823-1858], Ramalinga had conceded to tradition, but the alienation caused by that environment had made him depart from the exclusive and more traditional identity towards non-conformity. During the second phase [1858-1874], the earlier bare negation had begun to cause a 'secular identity' which in turn led to the formation of his conceptual framework and practical action. Ramalinga's metaphysics was a peculiar combination of both spirituality and materiality. For him the spiritual profit attainable through human existence was to achieve a 'bigger life of an un-interrupted, total, natural joyfulness' characteristic of the Grace. 'Education for deathlessness' must kindle the spirit of humanity as one in God and develop pity in the soul for the fellow humans. *Suddha Sanmarga* was the way to reality and it meant the negation of all the traditional ways. Organised religions and all the stumbling blocs

[42] S.Ramamurthy, "Education for Deathlessness: Ramalinga", *The Emergence of the Peasant Agrarian System in Tamil Nadu and its Impact on the Nineteenth Century Tamiil Renaissance and Modernisation Trends* (University of Madras, 1989) pp.162-224.

associated with it should be buried. The seeming contradictions in Ramalinga's works were the key to their human kernel. The death symbol was his critique of the contemporary society. The author, then, has dealt with the colonial agrarian conditions and related Ramalinga's critique with the plight of the peasantry, the artisan and handicraftsmen and agrestic labourers against the '*circar*-landlord-moneylender nexus.' Ramalinga's extreme spirituality had ultimately led to its opposite –the identification of the division of society into classes, imprecisely presented as the contraposition of the 'weak *jivas* or souls against the 'strong *jivas*, the vision of the latter being blurred by their 'hard glasses'. According to the author Ramalinga had started with the political metaphor, the image of the innocent calves being crushed under the wheels of the chariot, in *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam* [1854] and ended with the proclamation in the *Aarram* [Sixth] *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* that "this rule of the merciless shall go". Significantly the author has made varying efforts to come to grips with Ramalinga's movement and message by first applying Paul-O-Freire's theory of conscientisation, then relating them to the fourteen characteristics of Peasant Messianic movement of Fuchs and finally suggesting the applicability of Ranajit Guha's six invariant elements of insurgent peasant consciousness.

Another unpublished Ph.D. thesis related to the study of Ramalinga was that of J.P.Jeyakumar entitled *Kirittava Tamizh*

Vedaagamattin Samuga Panpattu Taakkam: Or Aayvu [The socio-cultural impact of the Tamil Bible: A Study] [1994][43] In this study, the author has dealt with probability of Ramalinga's exposure to Christianity in a chapter which has also incorporated Veda Nayagam Pillai's life as the latter was a contemporary of the former. For Jeyakumar, Ramalinga's life comprised of three phases – the first was the 'search' for identity in Siva, the second of 'revelation' of 'greater experience in Siva', and the third of the transference of the revelation into a 'new Gospel'. According to him, the early childhood had caused the alienation and the search for identity in Siva commenced with the participation in the Puranic discourses from the age of twelve [1835]. It could be called as the religious search or *Tiruvaacagam* identity. Extreme detachment, renunciation and non-conformity had characterised the search. The second phase, covering the *Karunguzhi-Vadalur* life [1858-1870], was a continuum with much rigidity on the one hand, and, on the other, the period of propagation of 'newer concepts' which Ramalinga only 'received' and not searched for. The latter development, according to Jeyakumar, had resulted from the exposure to the *Bible* (Tamil). Ramalinga called the 'greater experience in Siva' as *Suddha Sanmarga* meaning 'above the religious search of God'. The deviant characteristics in Ramalinga's paradigm thus summed up

[43]J.P.Jeyakumar, "Ramalingarum Veda Naayagarum", *Kiruttava Tamizh Vedaagamattin Samuga Panpattu Taakkam: Or Aayvu* (Bharathidasan University, 1994), pp.259-312.

under 'revealed truth' comprised of—the conception of 'Siva' by the new name *Arul Perum Jothi Aandavar* [Supreme Lord of Grace and Light], the announcement of the imminent coming of the Lord and resurrection of the dead, the eternal life after death in bliss, (*nittiya Jivan*) the perception of the Lord as 'Father' distinct from the traditional mode, the usage *Vaarttai* [word], and *Jiva Kaarunya*. During the third phase [1870-1874], Ramalinga, according to Jeyakumar, had sharpened and proclaimed *Suddha Sanmarga* as the new Gospel of redemption of humanity with stress on *Jiva Kaarunya*, 'resurrection of the dead' and 'sublime life without death'. Jeyakumar has finally concluded that Ramalinga was not a Christian but was one who reliably had exposure to the Tamil *Bible* and authored a Messianic Movement with Millenarian overtones.

In C.Paramarthalingam's work entitled *Social Reform Movement in Tamilnadu in the 19th Century with special Reference to St.Ramalinga* [1995], the second chapter has been devoted to a comprehensive study of Ramalinga's movement.[44] For him, Ramalinga had combined in his works both spirituality and social concerns which in turn had impelled him to propagate for reaching social reforms. The *Sanmarga* Movement transcended the barriers of caste, colour, region and religion. Ramalinga's philosophy had four facets. The realisation of the spiritual

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[44]C.Paramarthalingam,"St.Ramalinga",*Social Reform Movement in the Nineteenth Century Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to St.Ramalinga* (Madurai:Rajakumari Publications, 1995), pp.34-68.

oneness of the human beings, when coupled with compassion, would lead them in the pure righteous path to *Suddha Sanmarga* which would spiritually ensure the conversion of the human body into immortal forms, politically facilitate the rule of the *Sanmargists*, socially establish a casteless society without religious feud and economically promote an egalitarian society without economic exploitation. The *Sanga* was meant to preach and teach oneness, the *Saalai* for feeding the poor and the hungry and the *Sabhai* for precipitating collective worship. Ramalinga was unique in advocating unity, solidarity and promotion of mankind. His mystic philosophy was difficult for the common man to comprehend and follow and hence it never gathered much support. "The harmonious blending of religious concepts with the then existing social, political and economic order made the contemporary society treat him merely as a Saint well versed in occult."[45] According to Paramarthalingam, Ramalinga's view points could be considered as the basis for the movement of the depressed classes and also the Self-Respect Movement of the twentieth century.[46]

The treatment of *Sanmarga* as a spiritual reform movement has found its fuller expression in the recent works of S.Amirthalingam. *Vallalaarin Anuku Muraikal* [Vallalar's Approach] [1998], *Vallalaar*

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[45] Ibid., p.68.
[46] Ibid.

Vazhangiya Kodai [2000] [His Contributions] and *Vallalaarin Aalumai Uruvakkam* [His Making of a Personality] [2004] have been the three works of scholarly expression on the life and mission of St.Ramalinga. The first work has dealt with Ramalinga's approach to the problems of contemporary society and deliverance of his own message. The second has dealt with the contribution of Ramalinga to contemporary Tamil society in terms of a rationalist cultural existence and human intercourse, new poetry and prose, and Saivite revivalism as against the spread of Christianity. The third has dealt with the evolution of Ramalinga's personality from childhood to his emergence as a man of wisdom against the backdrop of contemporary life. The author has, in all the three works, attempted to exhaust all the available data to evaluate the height of Ramalinga's contributions, the qualitatively different nature of his perceptions and prescriptions and the unique greatness of his mission. A clear idealist metaphysics pervades over the entire works with the framework of spiritual degradation as thesis, spiritual negation as anti-thesis and spiritual re-insertion as synthesis along the Hegelian pattern. Everything would change once the individuals changed and formed a collective to effect a change of heart in others and envelop them within the collective. That Ramalinga was more a revolutionary than reformer in comprehending the dialectical unity of materiality and spirituality and that his philosophy was more specific to contemporaneity

than universality would be presented in this thesis taking a different view point from the author on many counts. The three works would deserve continued critical attention as they have emerged from a clear ideological perspective.

The latest in the research series pertaining to Ramalinga has been the doctoral thesis in Tamil submitted to the Bharathidasan University [2009], Tiruchirapalli by N.Susila Salomi entitled *Kirittava Camaya Paravalum Ramalingarin Sanmarga Iyakkamum* [The Spread of Christianity *vis a vis* the *Sanmarga* Movement of Ramalinga]. The author has studied the movement against the backdrop of the spread of the Tranquebar Lutheran Christianity and its decline in terms of social reforms, the plight of the weaker sections and colonial impact. Though the researcher has referred to the Anglicisation programme of the colonial rulers, she has not made any attempt to incorporate the developments concerning the colonial church and its interactions with the colonial rule itself as was the case with the Hindu Christian Church of Sattampillai of Tirunelveli.

E.V.Ramasami, the grand elder or *Periyar* of the Tamils has referred to Ramalingasami as *Periyar.* The reference would justify J.Rajamurthy's *Vallalaarum Periyaarum* [Vallalar and *Periyar*-2009]. The author has compared the two personalities in terms of their approach to caste, religion, tenets, God, Vedas, *Itihasas, Puranas* and *Sanmarga.* He

has evaluated, with critical insight, how *Periyar* E.V.Ramasami's 'Self-Respect' Movement was the logical culmination of Ramalinga's *Sanmarga* movement.

Anil Seal's *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* [1968] and R.Suntharalingam's *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India 1852-1891* [1974] have been two authentic studies dealing with the nineteenth century developments from the vantage point of the Indian response to the Western impact.[47] Anil Seal has restricted his study of the collaborators and competitors with stress on the western educated and those of the professions. But his observations regarding the rural polarisations were sharp, though not comprehensive. The rural elite formation has been listed. For him "the later nineteenth century was a gloomy time of rising population, increased landless labour, subdivision of holdings, heavier indebtedness of the peasant and a disastrous series of famines." Against this backdrop "the historiographical dispute, whether the Nationalist Movement came from the Western educated or from an indigenous tradition of revolt misses the point. Both operated at the same time."[48] Like Anil Seal, Suntharalingam has also "limited the

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[47] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1968: Cambridge University Press, 1971); R.Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India 1852-1891* (University of Arizona Press, 1974).
[48] Anil Seal, Ibid., p.16 F.N.

scope of the inquiry within the "language of modern politics".[49] Suntharalingam has provided adequate information regarding the commercial elites and the religious feuds. For him "the elements of unity in South India are to be traced principally in Hinduism and its social institution, the caste system, both of which have posited a common body of religious and social values that have transcended geographical and linguistic boundaries."[50] The response to the Western impact varied, affecting elite formation "with certain castes and certain linguistic groups more numerously represented than others."[51] However for him "neither caste nor religion became effective vehicles for political mobilisation during the period under study."[52] Subscribing first to the *suigeneris* theory of caste, and then linking caste oriented response to the western impact with the elite formation, he could reverse his path and deny the role of caste and religion in political mobilisation. Both Anil Seal and Suntharalingam had not made any mention of Ramalinga and his Movement. It could be hypothetically stated that Suntharalingam might have come across both, but as he was hesitant to extend the political awakening to the rural masses, he had proposed a reversal of the dialectic with the observation that the "caste association and linguistic movements were twentieth century phenomena, and their rise has to be

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[49] R.Suntharalingam, Op.cit...., p.XII.

[50] Ibid., p.5.
[51] Ibid., p.XIV.
[52] Ibid.

attributed to the failure of the professional elite to resolve tensions generated by the uneven rate of the Western impact in South India."[53]

The Scope for the Study

The scope for the present study has arisen from the following observations regarding the works reviewed:

* Much critical opinion has not emerged regarding either St.Ramalinga's life and Movement or the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu in proper historical perspective;

* Ramalinga's life has remained unrelated to stages; the stages have remained unrelated to his Movement; the movement has remained unrelated to the dynamics of the society at large; ritualism has gained precedence;

* Religious feud has been most often defined as a cause while the fact was that, before it became a cause, it was a consequence; hence to cite cause and effect relationship between the religious feud and Ramalinga's conceptual framework would smack of a metaphysical exercise;

* Religious needs and developments have remained unrelated to the spacio-temporal context;

* What was actually the beginning [*aadhi*] and end [*anthem*] of Ramalinga's mission has not been stated with precision;

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[53] Ibid.

* The study of the role of Ramalinga as a reformer has neither been objective and critical nor comprehensive and historical;

* Ramalinga's interaction with Christianity has not been objectively assessed with a non-partisan outlook;

* The treatment of the nineteenth century political interactions has been too general and imprecise negating the dialectical connection between politics and phenomena;

* The modern theories of socio-political phenomena and movements have not been applied with adequate relevance;

The colonial dynamics, as has been perceived in modern theories, has yet to receive the due attention.

* The internal evidences have been subjected to more subjective assessments than the objective and the corroborative;

* With reference to his interaction with the external milieu, Ramalinga has been studied mechanically, as an object, and not as a subject transforming history;

* Many incidents in Ramalinga's life have not been studied from a holistic perspective. Ramalinga's reference to the 'inimical times', the 'dangers', secrecy of residence, stay at the cane fields and threat to body parts have not drawn critical attention at all.

Hence the present study entitled:

Contextualising St. Ramalinga in the Nineteenth Century Tamil Society

Hypothesis

The present study has been carried out with the following hypothesis:

St.Ramalinga's *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* Movement bore the characteristics of the Saivite neo-bakthi movement, Saivite revival movement, Hindu religious reform movement, Hindu revival movement, spiritual unity movement, Utopian Socialist movement, religious messianic movement with Millenarian overtones, anti-colonial peasant movement and Subaltern movement, but was exclusively neither of them;

to say that it was a mere heterodox dissent movement along the *Siddha* tradition would tantamount to the denial of its basic kernel of contemporaneity and smack of an ahistoric exercise;

whereas Ramalinga was quite sensitive of his times and sensitised his contemporaries; that he was not for the revival of a moribund culture under impossible modern conditions, but the creation of a dynamic contemporary culture;

that his was the depiction of the plight of the people under the colonial conditions, their misery expropriation and repression in physical, social and cultural terms and their own response in various forms;

that his was the voice of the voiceless; it was a basic agrarian programme of sensitisation or conscientisation;

that his was the pioneering form of Tamil Nationalism and

that the spark of the *Sanmarga* Movement did not create a prairie fire owing to the absence of a fundamental class to translate the programme into practical action.

Objectives

The following have been the objectives of the study;

1. Understanding the linear correspondence which existed between the episodic life of Ramalinga and the evolution of his personality;

2. Evaluating Ramalinga's literary conventions in the context of the contemporary life situations;

3. Inquiring whether Ramalinga's treatment of the contemporary conditions was sporadic, fragmented and reformistic or holistic and a total negation;

4. Scrutinising whether Ramalinga's paradigm was a bare negation or the creative affirmation of a programme; and

5. Assessing the place of Ramalinga in the contemporary history of the Tamils.

Methodology

The research has been basically descriptive, analytical and interpretative of the primary data. Given the nature of the primary

sources, textual criticism would become an essential component of the methodological framework.

Textual criticism would in turn demand the study of texts as discourses with its associated linguistic techniques. Ramalinga's writings and the movement he sponsored have to be viewed as his dialogue with his contemporaries. The primary sources being literary, the historical reconstruction or re-constructive historiography method shall have to be necessarily adopted.

For this, the primary data have to be interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of colonial studies.

Research being centered on the 'text in motion' or the *Sanmarga* Movement, the analysis shall have to be essentially carried out within the framework of the pioneering works on social movements that have made quite a significant impact over the years.

The study of a Movement would necessitate its understanding as a phenomenon encompassing a polarity; the method of dialectics would enable one to comprehend what is stated along with what is not stated; the null hypotheses have to be formed wherever necessary.

The comparative method shall have to be adopted to evaluate the significance of parallel contemporary movements and events and responses.

Corroboration could be effected with the data provided by the Missionary Histories and Dalit Studies.

Since the study would amount to an indepth analysis of St.Ramalinga's writings and the movement sponsored by him, the case study method would have validity in generalising the findings of the microsphere to the macrosphere of the colonial situation.

The study would not require the direct application of the statistical tools. However the statistical information available for the macrosphere would be used to substantiate certain analytical inferences made on the original data.

The consultancy of the specialists in the field of Tamilology, Saivism, Sociology, Education Technology and Economic History has been utilised wherever necessary and inevitable.

The Sources: A Discussion

Contextualising St.Ramalinga in the nineteenth century Tamil society would necessitate the study of his interaction with the socio-economic and political milieu on the one hand and the religio-cultural milieu on the other. The primary sources in this context would comprise of all of Ramalinga's works, both in prose and verse; the contemporary records providing data for re-constructing his life and movement; works of comparable contemporaries'; the official records of the century

concerning administration and governance, education and employment, language and culture and social life and religion especially with respect to the Madras Presidency and its Tamil districts; the writings of other contemporaries bearing significance, and the works dealing with the religious interactions and developments, inclusive of the Missionary records.[54]

Ramalinga was an effective articulator in both the media of prose and verse. What had been communicated in poetry stood elaborated in prose and what was written in prose remained authenticated in verse. In the era of predominant shift from poetry to prose, he had shown a remarkable competency in moulding both in the desired direction of contemporaneity.

Ramalinga's writings in poetry have been compiled ever since his time under the title *Tiru Arutpa*. The work had appeared in print during the nineteenth century in six *Tirumurais* or parts the first four together in 1867 and 1887 [TVM edition], the fifth in 1880 [TVM], the sixth in 1885 [LNC edition] and all the six together in a single volume for the first time in 1892 [SP edition] and then in 1896 [BRM edition].

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[54] See Bibliography for publication details; for the consolidated information: Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit.......

The single volume SMK or MC edition of 1924, two volumes of SSSS edition of subsequent years, and the 12 volumes of BKP edition between1931-1961 have been the early twentieth century editions.

In all these editions, Ramalinga's works had not been presented in chronological sequence. The *Tirumurais* 1-6 were only to be presented in the sequential order of 5, 3, 2, 1, 4, and 6. Further the prose writings were irrationally mixed with *Tiru Arutpa* from the 1885 LNC edition onwards. The modern methods of the publication of texts had not been adopted. The scientific study of the original manuscript demanded fresh scrutiny and classification.

Uran Adigal's *Tiru Arutpa* [UA edition] of 1972 was the first attempt at making the standard edition of the work. The words in every foot of a verse were set apart from each other to avoid the chain sequence, the morphemic variants were pointed out, the logical flow order of the verses was checked and the necessary tables, editorial notes, photo exhibits, manuscript samples, catalogues and glossaries were provided. The UA second edition, called the RPM edition [Ramalingar Pani Mandram] [1981), presented the first five *Tirumarais* in chronological order in one volume and the sixth in another; the prose works and writings were published as a separate edition in 1978 and as RPM edition in 1981.

The RPM edition of Uran Adigal has been accepted and mostly followed by the scholars, for it has comprehensively presented

Ramalinga's works in three volumes with modern editorial skills, exhausting all the previous editions with a scientific perception. This would be the standard Text for the present study.

The Kazhagam edition of *Tiru Arutpa* has also been in popular use. The Sivanandha Mission edition in six volumes has come to stay. Annamalai University at Chidambaram has published a nine volume series of *Tiru Arutpa* [1979-1988] with Avvai Duraiswamy Pillai's commentary for 4614 verses.

In 1851, Ramalinga published the theological work of a Saivite entitled *Ozhivil Odukkam* [Ceaseless Detachment] with his elaborate commentary in prose for the preface of the work. In 1855, he had published another work entitled *Tonda Mandala Cadakam* authentically explaining the etymology of the term *Tonda Mandalam* with epigraphical evidences. In 1857 he published *Cinmaya Deepikai* of Virudachalam Muthayya Swamigal. Ramalinga wrote a commentary on the twenty second verse of one of the Saivite devotional literatures *Pon Vannattu Andhathi* and also another on a couplet of Vedanta Desigar. He also wrote a treatise on the greatness of the Tamil language, as against the eulogised claims of Sanskrit, with a view to enlightening the significance of the former to the *Sankaracharya* of *Kanchi.* He could explain in detail the significance of the invocatory term *Ulakelaam* (all the world in *Om*). These commentaries and notes, only published after his life time, would

throw light on the emerging personality of Ramalinga in prime youth and thereby, constitute a primary source for his study.

Coupled with the above, but usually relegated to the appendices of Ramalinga's works, one would find the other documents which deserved to be treated as primary sources providing corroborative evidences. The two unauthenticated documents in prose, one depicting Ramalinga's explanation of the first letter 'a' of the Tamil alphabets and the other narrating the proceedings of his arguments with the scholars of the *Brahma Gnana Sabha*; the dedicative verse written and offered for the Advaita Vedhantic work *Nista Anubuthi* [1851]; a similar but elaborate one offered for *Chidambara Puranam* [1855] of the founder saint of the Thirukkovalur Mutt; another for *Munisiff* Veda Nayagam Pillai's [1826-1889] *Nidhi Nul* [1858]; the fourth for the *Songs of Deva Natha Pillai* and the fifth for the *Songs of Muthsamy Mudaliyar;* the *Upadesa Verse* written for Sabapathy Mudaliyar; the letter in verse written to the *Acharya* of the Madurai Mutt [1854]; a similar verse written to the Tambiran Swamigal of the Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt and another to Astavadhanam Sabapathy Mudaliyar of Purasai; his autobiographically symbolic work *Kudumba Kosam* and the instruction treatise for wedded life, *Kudumba Koram* – need to be classified and reviewed under one head, for these would testify themselves as critical primary sources throwing light on the intellectual

pursuits of Ramalinga before and at the time of settling at *Chidambaram* or *Vadalur.*

Ramalinga's first major work in prose was *Manumurai Kanda Vaacagam* [1854]. This was written by him on the request of the *Sasthra Vilakka Sangam* [Society for the Exposition of the *Sastras*] at Madras. This primary source would acquire much significance once it was understood that the work re-interpreted and not elaborated the Sashtra.

Ramalinga**'s** *magnum opus* in prose was *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* [1867-1874]. The work was intended to be written in seven parts, but the third part itself remained unfinished at the time of the disappearance of Ramalinga in 1874. The primacy of this source would lay in the fact that it formed the climax of Ramalinga's message expressed in uncouched language.

Ramalinga's letter numbering fifty, the fragments numbering thirteen, letters written to Ramalinga by the others numbering seven and those exchanged between the *Sanmargists* numbering twelve would constitute another crucial primary source. They were all written during the twelve years of Ramalinga's stay at *Karunguzhi* [Chidambaram] and *Vadalur* and they would provide valuable autobiographical or biographical evidences some of which could not be found attested elsewhere.

The four recorded mass prayers of Ramalinga, delivered by him during his stay at *Vadalur* and *Mettu Kuppam* (*Siddhi Valaagam*) [1870-1874], have constituted a quite unique and significant primary source. Two of them have been found to be written by Ramalinga himself and the other two have been authenticated, one by the presence of his signature at the end and another by corroborative manuscripts. The *Vinnappams* [Prayers] would bear testimony for Ramalinga's retrospective review of his own life, desire to arrive at a synthesis of the philosophy of *Sanmarga* and attempts to evolve certain concepts.

The invitations, announcements and directives of Ramalinga issued during the *Vadalur-Mettu Kuppam* phase [1867-1874] numbering eighteen have to be accepted as constituting a primary source, for these were issued and circulated during Ramalinga's life-time, that Ramalinga was reliably learnt to have gone through the first draft and added fest script in some and that they were crucial as they pertained to the four institutions which Ramalinga had zealously sponsored. The confidentiality assigned to some by Ramalinga would require critical scrutiny.

The *Upadesas* [sermon] of Ramalinga numbering nine would constitute another primary source. These discourses were held during 1867-1874. They have all been recorded by those who had heard them in person. Both Bala Krishna Pillai and Uran Adigal, the two authoritative

editors of Ramalinga's works [BKP and RPM editions], have not questioned their reliability but recommended only exercising caution in deciphering the messages. The style has been attested as that of Ramalinga and the messages have been found to tally with those of the *Aarram*[Sixth] *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa.* Whether to accept the radical changes in perception which occurred in Ramalinga at the last phase or to offer an apologia for individual vagaries of reception and communication has been inherent in the utilization of this source.

Ramalinga's medical and medicinal hints have been recorded by some and they would form a minor primary source. This source would reveal Ramalinga's attitude to life. The land grant document and inventory document pertaining to the *Sattiya Dharma Saalai* at *Vadalur* would throw light on the popular involvement in Ramalinga's movement.

Ramalinga's disciple Thozhudur Velayudha Mudaliyar [1832-1889] wrote the history of the origin of *Tiru Arutpa* in verse entitled *Tiru Arutpa Varalaaru* most probably before 1876.[55] This could be a primary source in a restricted sense.

Ramalinga [1823-1874] was a teacher with high intellectual zeal and creative potential, episodically placed in different evolutionary stages throughout his life. Maha Vidhwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai [1815-1876] of the Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt was the most reputed teacher of his

[55] Uran Adigal, Op.cit...., pp.324-330.

times. Both had been taught Tamil by Maha Vidhwan Kanchipuram Sabapathy Mudaliyar [1792-1871] at Madras, though not at the same time. Both great men offered a contrast by their life-situations and experience. In this context, *Sri Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai Avarkal Carittiram* [1933, 1934] and *En Carittiram* [1950] have the justification to be classified as primary sources in terms of their closeness and objectivity, and the sincerity of the disciple U.V.Swaminatha Iyer [1855-1942] Many contemporary teachers and scholars interacted with Ramalinga to learn or even to test, and any information in this regard would acquire the status of a primary source in contextualising Ramalinga in contemporary society.

Ramalinga's philosophical – religious – cultural – spiritual - bhakthi

paradigm stood in contrast to the Saivite identity of the Mutts and the exclusiveness of the religious identity of the contemporary rural elite revealing the fact of negation of the traditional *bakthi marga,* the canonical orthodoxy of the *sanadhanis* and the rigorous rituality of the commercial elite and was paralleled by the musical sanmarga of St.Thyagaraja [1767-1847], the inclusive and re-insertive *bakthi* trait of Gopala Krishna Bharathi [1785-1875] and the Scriptural Spirituality of Veda Nayaga Sastriar [1773-1864]. In this context, *The Collected works of St.Thyagaraja,* G.K.Bharathi's *Nandanaar Carittira Kirttanai* [1861],

U.V.Swaminatha Iyer's *Gopala Krishna Bharathiar* [1936], Veda Nayaga Sastriar's *Sastra Kummi* [1840], *Gnaana Pada Kirttanaikal* [1853], *Bethlehm Kura Vanji* and other works would constitute a primary source. To this shall be added the works depicting the religious disputes of the century and the works of Abbe J.Dubois entitled *The State of Christianity in India during the Early Nineteenth Century and Hindu customs and Manners.* Also to be added are the available documents of the *Hindu Literary Society,* [1831], *Madras Native Association* [1852], *The Hindu Progressive Improvement Society* [1852] and *Sadur Veda Siddhantha Sabha.* The issues of the periodicals-*Native Interpreter* [1840], *Crescent* [1844], *Rising Sun* [1853], *The Hindu* [1878] and *Swedesa Mittiran* [1882] would provide direct information on certain developments in this regard. As regards the last two periodicals, only the selected early issues would suit the purpose.

Ramalinga's prose works, his advocacy for establishing the unique greatness of Tamil, interest in expounding and editing works of merit, and positive attitude to the classics as revealed by the teaching of *Kural* would place him at the forefront of the nineteenth century Modernisors of the Tamil language. His views on language learning in general and the Tamil language in particular would acquire historic significance when contrasted with those of Robert C.Caldwell [1814-1891], Sundaram Pillai [1855-1897] and V.G.Surya Narayana Sastri [1870-1903].

The Tamil Renaissance of the nineteenth century was inevitably coupled with the socio-cultural and religious reforms. Some of the Modernisors were reputed reformers of Hinduism and convert Christianity. Sharp contrast existed between Ramalinga and the modernisors with respect to the social reforms. Veda Nayagam Pillai's [1826-1889] *Nidi Nul* [1859] and *Pen Kalvi* [1869, 1870], V.N.Sastriar's works listed earlier, the information pertaining to the commercial and professional elites including those in the periodicals already cited would make the contrast explicit. V.G.S.Sastri's *Naataka Viyal* (1897), *Tanippaasurattogai* [1899] and *Tamil Mozhiyin Varalaaru* [1903] and Sundaram Pillai's *Manonmaniyam* [1891] deserve to be treated as primary sources to elicit the comparative and continuity criteria.

The explicit references in Ramalinga's works to the merciless rule, the evil allies, tyrannical extortion of land revenue, debt burden, expropriation of land, money, utensils and huts, poverty, suicides, desertion of fields, nomadisation of peasants and the loss of values emanating from the intrusion of money relations into the rural economy necessitate their reading along with the contemporary writings by the nationalist, historians, economists and political *pandits*.

The witness given by Thozhudur Velayutha Mudaliyar to the *Brahma Gnana Sangam* or Theosophical Society as published in *The*

Theosophist in 1882 and the notification of Ramalinga's disappearance in South Arcot Gazetteer [1906] should be considered as primary sources.[56]

The secondary sources would comprise of the modern works and articles in journals, souvenirs and newspapers on Ramalinga and his movement, both in Tamil and English; works on Saivism; history of Tamil literature series; works pertaining to the nineteenth century; biographies; studies on Renaissance, religious reforms and Nationalism; studies on social movements, changes and concepts; colonial studies and studies on peasant movements including Subaltern and Messianic Movement studies; Dalit Studies; Missionary and Church History; Economic Histories; and works dealing with the political intercourse, both national and global.

Limitations

The present study entitled **Contextualising St.Ramalinga in the Nineteenth Century Tamil Society** has been carried out with the following limitations:

a. The study has been broadly focused on St.Ramalinga who had made his disappearance in 1874. The modernisors of the century have been dealt with for comparative evaluation under conextualisation. The nationalist politics has inevitably fallen outside the scope of the study;

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[56] Ibid., pp.624-626.

b. As a logical corollary of the first limitation, the study of the novelists and of the life and works of the personalities like Marai Malai Adigal [1876-1950], U.V.Swaminatha Iyer [1855-1942], Thiru Vi.Kalyana Sundara Mudaliyar [1883-1953], and C.Subramanya Bharathi [1882-1921] have not been covered by the study;

c. In the case of those who have been covered, only the selected works have formed part of the study in terms of relevance;

d. The history of Saivism and the spread of Christianity in Tamil Nadu referred to in the study do not warrant the exhaustion of all the sources in that regard in terms of their limited application;

e. The first five *Tirumurais of Tiru Arutpa* have comparatively lesser significance in terms of historical relevance and have not required an indepth study;

f. The scope of the study does not warrant any indepth economic analysis of the period. However, only the broader consensus areas and the information from the classics have been used to relate the colonial period in the contextualisation process;

g. Since the study has been based on a comparative evaluation of the various approaches to Ramalinga and his movement, repeated references to certain texts would become inevitable owing to their merit and greater relevance; and

h. Since Ramalinga's interaction with the Islamic religion has not come to light, the study could not allocate space in that regard.

Chapters

Besides Introduction and Conclusion, the thesis consists of Five Chapters.

Chapter I deals with the problems of contextualisation of St.Ramalinga against the backdrop of the limitations of the prevailing state of knowledge, the lack of objectivity in critical perception and the non-comprehension of certain basic facts.

Chapter II studies the unique role of Ramalinga as a modernisor with reference to the advocacy of language modernisation and in comparison and contrast with the contemporary educated middle class modernisors.

Chapter III provides a study of the social reform perspective of St.Ramalinga and his unique conceptualisations of the cultural-ideological superstructure.

Chapter IV encapsulates the structural critique of St.Ramalinga leading to the identification of the changed and changing correlations of class forces in contemporary agrarian scenario.

Chapter V lists the movement strategies of St.Ramalinga in their historical evolution and as a logical culmination of his perception of the basic structure and ideological superstructure.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXTUALISATION

The Symbol of Light

The chronological sequence of the publication of St.Ramalinga's works and the references to Ramalinga made therein from time to time have brought to light the evolutionary aspect of his personality in terms of popular perception.[1] St.Ramalinga [1823-1874] named 'Ramalingam' at birth, acquired the reputation as 'Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai' in the traditional way during youth, became a *Periyavar* or 'great elder' at *Karunguzhi*-Chidambaram and was exalted as *Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar*, meaning the 'man of sparkling divine grace' at *Vadalur.*[2] Ramalinga could acquire the identity as *Arul Perum Siddhar*, or the 'great Siddha of grace', 'Swami' or 'Saint', and *Arul Perum Jothi Tani Perum Karunai Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar* meaning the 'man of sparkling divine grace who revealed the truth of God as the supreme light of grace and unique mercy' – all after his mysterious disappearance. These references to Ramalinga covering his birth at *Marudhur*-Chidambaram, migration to *Ponneri* at North-West, then to Madras at North-East, from there to *Karunguzhi-Chidambaram* back down South and finally to *Vadalur* nearby would carve the symbol of a burning thread lamp of clay

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[1] See bibliography – Primary Sources –A: The works of Ramalinga.

[2] Though the attribute was given by Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar to 'Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai' at the title page of Tiru Arutpa-1 (1867) it gained popularity with the people during Ramalinga's Vadalur life. Ramalinga, using Tamizh syntactical grammar, could explain it to denote his humility. See Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* (1971: Vadalur: SSA Nilayam, 1976), pp.321-330; Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai* (Chennai: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981), Verse 3400:2-3.

which has outlived time and technology and become inseparable from the cultural ethos of the people like the name of *Vallalaar* himself. Evidently Ramalinga symbolized 'light' as against 'darkness'. How the life-thread of the lamp got trimmed with one terminal projecting over the rim, was lit, and drew energy from the pool in which it had been immersed to the neck has been a matter of varying concerns. 'Darkness' *could not have lit the lamp and the 'spark' had to come. The* identification of the origin of the spark has situated the critics in opposite camps. The lamp image would make it clear that the totality of the experiences constituted a unity which could not be fragmented.

The Problem concerning the Sources

That the closeness of a source to the subject of research need not necessarily be more authentic and exhaustive would make itself felt in the study of Ramalinga too. Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar was the disciple of Ramalinga and, as such, he was closer to the latter than anybody else. His *Tiru Arutpa Varalaaru*, published along with the first four *Tirumurais* of *Tiru Arutpa* [1867] has provided only meager information regarding Ramalinga's worldly life. The author was justified on many counts. First, he had to restrict himself, for he was aware that his 'Guru' had already objected to the use of attributes earlier. Secondly, the work had been released in 1867 and many crucial developments were only to occur during the seven years to follow. Thirdly the work was

intended to introduce *Tiru Arutpa* and was not meant to be a biography of Ramalinga. The problem then arises as to the authenticity of the various episodes and miracles attributed to Ramalinga's life in the biographical sketches of the early twentieth century. Paradoxically in some of the episodes, Tozhuvur Velayadha Mudaliyar himself has been implicated like the Sankaracharya episode and 'grammatically structured letter' episode.[3]

The most serious dimension of the problem concerning the sources could be explicitly felt from a study of the Statement of his to the Author of 'Hints on Esoteric Theology' wherein, besides blatantly 'Hinduising' Ramalinga as a yogi, an ascetic, a mind reader, a non-caste humanist and a miracle maker of popular attraction, Tozhuvur Velayadha Mudaliyar had branded his movement as a 'religion based on pure science' formed in communion with the 'Mahatmas' of the continental North and prophesying the arrival of the Theosophists.[4] Uran Adigal has referred to the erroneous dates and misnomenclatures of the institutions sponsored by Ramalinga as due to 'slips or neglect.'[5] But this could not be viewed with such naivity against the backdrop of the mysterious disappearance of the Master, the controversies over that arising among the people, the 'physical dangers to life' mentioned by Ramalinga earlier

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[3] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* Ibid., pp.147-148, 431-435.
[4] Ibid., pp.611-614.
[5] Ibid., pp.619-621 F.N.

in his letters and advice to brave them, the dismembering of the 'Sangha' and fleeing of the close associates after his disappearance.[6] While Ramalinga had told everybody that they could not see him thereafter, Velayudha Mudaliyar's statement promised his arrival one day.[7] At the top of the story lay the entry of Velayudha Mudaliyar as the 'Second *Pandit*' of the Tamil Department of the elite Presidency College at Madras from where he had given the witness. Besides the alleged 'slip or neglect' lay the fact that Velayudha Mudaliyar had masterly planned to hide the establishment of the *Saalai,* retain the 'Vedic' attribute of the *Sangha* which Ramalinga had dispensed with in 1872, and replace the specifics of *Jiva Kaarunya* dharma of the *Sangha* by the desire "for the propagation of the true *Vedic* doctrine",[8] Though the observed deviations could not be overstated, the misinterprepations could not be hushed away in any rational historiography. The first phase of .Ramalinga study had actually commenced with Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar projecting the former as a unique divine personality with yogic and *Tanthric* capabilities. The ground was thus set for the early twentieth century conceptualisation.

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[6] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalar Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi*, (Chennai: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981), Letters to Others, No.5, p.417.
[7] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit, p.613.
[8] Ibid., p.613.

Changed Methodology Needed

Conventionally in biographical studies the variables would be formed from the objective external data and the internal evidences would then be assimilated within that framework. Uran Adigal has followed this methodology and his biographical portrayal of Ramalinga has, by far, been the best. But the reliance on external data which are not empirical but only subjective has necessitated the accommodation of all the hearsays and concoctions and myths without the means of filtering them. The internal evidences, in this context, have only to be suitably interpreted to befit the paradigm. To quote an example, the reliance on the data projecting Ramalinga as a 'yogi' would only drive one to interpret the reference to "the money I had made"[9] as that of *Rasa Vaadha* or Alchemistry whereas Ramalinga had simply referred to his own earnings. The reference should have to be attributed to his childhood experience rather than to the life at Chidambaram or *Vadalur* where he had to mediate with friends for money on his behalf and on behalf of many others in distress, as evidenced by his letters.[10] The semantic context could not be missed. The reference was to '*panam*' or currency and not to *pon* or gold. If there arose even a leakage of the information that

[9] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, Ibid., Verse, 3396:1-2.

[10] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Uraniadai Pagudi,* op.cit., pp.479-380, 392, 405, 486.

Ramalinga had made the currency, serious consequences would inevitably have resulted under the *Raj.*

The best way out would be to start with the processing of the internal evidences with the necessary cross-checks and accommodating all the available data with scientific precision. Porayar Chidambara Swamigal has already paved the way in his biography of Ramalinga [1963].[11] The methodology would prove to be appropriate in view of the fact that, in the case of Ramalinga, what had been written in verse remained corroborated by what had been written in prose. Besides, the letters and other evidences could be critically used to strengthen or negate any internal evidence. Finally, the internal evidences are not fragmentary in nature since Ramalinga himself has put them in order. Ramalinga's life, on the other hand, has been fragmented or partitioned by the scholars professing objectivity and social relevance and laying stress on either his entry into the world as a *Puranic* discourse maker at the age of twelve in 1835, his migration to Chidambaram from Madras in 1858, or his negation of the past and acquiring of new *Gnaana* in 1873.[12] Those who advocated these cleavages have, unknowingly, by their exercise sliced out a considerable part of Ramalinga's life itself. Not a single day in the life of a person could be discounted as a waste or

[11] Chidambara Swamigal, *Chidambaram Ramalinga Swamigal Carittira Curukkam* (Porayar, 1963) Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit, p.12.

[12] They are the 'search for identity theorists', the Nationalist writers and the Christian researchers respectively. For the review of their works, see "Sources: A Discussion" in the Introductory Chapter.

mislink. Uran Adigal's *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* (1971) has been set as a five compartment train with the data packed in each compartment without much processing but with the avowed intention of delivering the signs of divinity uniformly at every stage to portray the divine personality.

Ramalinga's Stylistics

For Henry Hudson, "Style is the man" and so it was with St.Ramalinga. Mere semantics would never reveal the truth but with stylistics. The three explicit components of Ramalinga's stylistics have been (a) retrospective review of life and self-criticism; (b) attributing divinity to radical changes intended and to unforeseen developments and phenomena; and (c) the utterance of a statement with Messianic overtone. At the last part of his life at Chidambaram [*Karunguzhi*] and *Vadalur*, Ramalinga had begun to collect the emotions of his life in tranquility and make a serious introspection of the life he had had in retrospective terms with a view to unearthing the real meaning and dynamics of that life process. This retrospection was methodological in ordering the past experiences with precision. One should only have to follow it up with a critical mind to recreate the format of life furnished by Ramalinga. The verses in the Sixth *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* and the Prayers and *Upadesas* in prose have to be studied in correlation and corroboration to unearth the pattern. For example, when Ramalinga

found it necessary to explain his sharp break with the past to his contemporaries in 1873, he made the self-criticism that his awareness [*arivu*] or intellect was only at low ebb in his early years.[13] It would become erroneous to attribute the actual change to that year, for such a premise would be contradicted by the internal evidences.[14]

The chief operation dynamic of Ramalinga's retrospective perception of life was the technique of attributing divinity with a view to providing logic in continuum. With humility, he has explained all the positive developments of his 'self' in terms of divine will and guidance. Being a mass interactor, he was only pragmatic in advancing his perception by adopting such a tactic. He invoked divinity to act to overcome inhibitions, hurdles and fetters of life, to get cleared of doubts and fears and arrive at a decision, to concretize the perception of life having been arrived at, to generate the power within to act, to make-believe the advocacy, to sustain action-potential, to draw necessary inspiration, to project anything as superior, to stress inevitability, and to promote sharing of experience. This part of Ramalinga's stylistics was of popular origin and could be labeled as 'subaltern' in view of the fact that these techniques have been the components of the regular social

[13] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi*, Op.Cit., Perupadesam, p.355.
[14] M.P. Sivagnanam inaugurated the trend; see *Vallalaar Kanda Orumaippaadu* (1962; Chennai: Pungodi Pathippagam, 1998), *Manumurai Kanda Vaacagam* (1854) would contradict the immaturity before 1858 theory.

interactions of the ordinary people.[15] Ramalinga's style of communicating things as 'secret' would strengthen the premise of the popular origin of his stylistics.

The Indian society has been a closed society operating with the elders-dominated joint family system, ritually supported vertical hierarchical structure and community control. Ramalinga knew how to *communicate with the people encapsulated within the family,* community, religion and caste systems and institutions. He knew that he had to speak to them with the authority of an elder. The command giving messianic overtones in his speech and verse was part of his stylistics and bore testimony to this leadership profile.[16] The commands were oftentimes issued as if they were of divine origin and meant to be communicated through him. The warnings and punishments were also

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[15] Ramalinga was cautious of the religious feelings of the ordinary people. In this, he resembled Marx in his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", Introduction (1844) reproduced in *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976).

[16] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Urai Nadai Pagudi*, op.cit, pp.429-430, 436-437; "There shall not be any debate on this" (p.429); "The sacred thread shall not be removed from the wife when the husband is dead; the husband shall not remarry when the wife is dead; don't be bewildered when the children are dead; ...He would resurrect those who belonged to Saalai and were dead. It is true. It is true" (p.430) "Those who live here (at Siddhi Valaagam) must be united without creating any obstacle in matters of worships. ... dropping hatred, mingle with emotional unity. Those who could not mingle thus shall be separated". pp.436-437. Also see Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai,* op.cit., verse 5527, 5817: "Don't Shake. Don't move a bit. Don't aspire anything else. Don't believe this deceitful world" (5527:1-3)

This is the word of truth spelt by me for thee to know
There shall be no doubt and be happy
This day shall be that of coming of Graceful Light
And coming days are those of joy
Suddha Siva Sanmarga shall prevail and all the worlds
Shall remain purified and thy words shall stand
The dead shall rise to roam in happiness
And the rule of Grace shall prevail *everywhere (5817)*

Also refer to verses 3446, 3801

issued in this way. To climax them all, Ramalinga would tell the people that he had been deputed in this world by divine dispensation to deliver the message.[17]

Most of the supernatural phenomena, the myths, the stories of revelation, divine interventions and directions, miracle episodes, alchemy, Chidambaram *darshan* [Vision]of eternity by the months old child, becoming educated without education owing to the attainments in previous births and communion with God through the mirror have crept into the life history of Ramalinga owing to the reverse application of the components of his stylistics with a view to establish the divine coming of Ramalinga, his divine dispensation and divine take-back. A century long application of the reverse or inversion methodology has helped the concretisation of St.Ramalinga's image as one of illusion and delusion and a negation of reality.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to locate Ramalinga in his real connections and interactions, see him 'walk on his legs' and identify the kernel of his practical action without taking recourse to the reverse methodology which has caused much damage to the *sanmarga* historiography.

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[17] Uran Adigal *(ed.) Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit, verse 3485.

The Three Phases Theory

The internal references in verse and prose have made it clear that St.Ramalinga during Chidambaram-Vadalur life, had comprehended his earlier life, since childhood, in three distinct phases: (a) the period of sensations (*Ulagu Unarrci Kaalam*); (b) the period of sensitivity (*Ulakiyal Arivu Kaalam*); and (c) the period of sensitization (*Ulakil Aadal Kaalam*).[18] *For Ramalinga, the second phase commenced at the age of twelve.*[19] Hence the first phase encompassed childhood. The third phase has been associated with Chidambaram as per the references. To be precise, 1823 to 1835; 1835-1858; and 1858-1874 A.D. constituted the three phases respectively. Explicitly, Ramalinga did not apply any religious yardstick to effect the demarcation but only the social. The references to divine interventions and guidance have to be understood in the light of Ramalinga's stylistics.

The Impact of Childhood Experiences

Through experiments in mental psychology, Sigmund Freud has provided invaluable and innumerable evidences as to how the experiences of the child entered into the unconscious, created impressions and thereby sow the seeds for the hidden impulses that

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[18] Ibid., verses 3392-3392, 3395-3396, 3440, 3454, 3484-3486, 3510 for phase I; verses 3390, 3396, 3397, 3404, 3443, 3445, 3447, 3449, 3451-3453, 3457, 3459, 3461-3462, 3467, 3478, 3481-3482, 3535, 3537 for phase II; verses 3310, 3330, 3400, 3403, 3408, 3413, 3415, 3482, 3506-3509, 3527, 3574, 3576, 3674,3675, 3679, 3680, 3683, 3710-3719, 3842, 3844, 4296, 4517, 4878-4879, 4891 for phase III; Ibid., *Urainadai Pagudi*, pp.355, 444-450-452.

[19] Ibid., *Aaraam Tirumurai,* verse. 3535.

decided future behavioural patterns. A brilliant student firmly resisting to leave the back bench seat near the wall in the class room and a lean boy often having the match winning fight of a rat with the cat in his dream, to quote only two instances, have been explained by Freud as due to bitter childhood impressions.[20] For the creative writers, on the other hand, the child has been the pet image, for childhood would be the focal point of social relations in a given society. Both would apply in the case of Ramalinga, for, on the one hand, Ramalinga was, himself, quite convinced that his childhood experiences had had a tremendous bearing on his character,[21] and, on the other, the experiences could make it clear that the image of the child emerging from it symbolized the socio-economic and political conditions of the times. These two aspects have been missed by the 'apportioning and allocating divinity at every stage' methodology adopted by most of the sympathetic critics of Ramalinga. The child (Ramalinga) falling from the huge pial at midnight and escaping unhurt have driven the biographers to suggest the 'timely' intervention of the 'Lord', but the actual 'fact' of the child having to sleep on the pial [raised floor] even without the folding arms of the mother on him and, most probably with an empty stomach, would not strike them. One has to infer that Ramalinga's stylistics of attributing divine

[20] The first was due to the unanticipated slap on the back from the father for playing in the street; the second was due to the helplessness of the boy against the hefty teacher who beat him always.

[21] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai,* op.cit., verse 3392.

deliverance has been cooked and served.[22] There was no sign that the child slept inside the house from the next day. On the contrary Ramalinga's own utterances have made it clear that nobody ever bothered when he slipped away from the house itself.

Ramalinga was a reputed Tamil grammarian of his days and he was no casual user of the language. He has used three specific words – *unarcci* or sensation, *arivu* or sensitivity and *aadal* or sensitisation respectively to depict the three phases of life. The mode of relating the world to the phenomena was also significant. *Ulagu Unarcci* meant the sensation caused by the external world and denoted the third case in Tamil. *Ulagiyal arivu* meant the sense perception of the external world denoting the second case. *Ulagil aadal* meant the human sensuous activity in the world denoting the fifth case. The phenomena have to be taken as 'the predominant' in each stage. As such, the childhood would be predominated by the storage of sensations caused by the electrical potentials charged by the objective external world on the senses of the child. The child would learn through imitation and analogy and consequent language forming but not with the pace of the sensations, as a result of which many sensations would get stored without processing at

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[22] Ibid., verse 4134.

the cerebral cortex.[23] The unconscious mind would take shape from such unprocessed storage of sensations.

Ramalinga was born on 5th October 1823 at Marudhur near Chidambaram in South Arcot District to Ramayya Pillai and Chinnammal who belonged to a traditional *Karunikar* family of Saiva Vellalas. The *Karunikar* were traditional village accountants deriving their origin from *Karnam* (*karnam* > *karna kaaran* > *karnakan/karnakar* > *karunikar*). The child 'Ramalingam', lost his father when he was only six months old. Ramayya Pillai was also a *Kanakkaayar* or traditional village teacher. Ramalinga's mother happened to be his sixth wife. She had given birth to Sabapathy, Parasuraman, Sundaram and Unnamulai (the last two being females) before 'Ramalingam' was born. With the demise of the head of the family, they had to migrate to Ponneri first and finally to Madras after one or two years. Sabapathy and Parasuraman studied under Maha Vidhwan Sabapathy Mudaliyar [1792-1871] and the eldest of the brothers could soon become the breadwinner for the family as he had become a specialist *puranic* discourse [*Sangitha vinigai*] maker in elite family circles.[24]

In his reminiscences, Ramalinga has stated that he had learnt many things untaught. What all formal education could have imparted to

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[23] W.F.Ganong, *Review of Medical Physiology* (1963: 19th ed. U.S.A: Prentice Hall International,1999), pp,247-265.

[24] For the wide prevalence of the puranic discourse, refer to U.V.Swaminatha Iyer, *Gopala Krishna Bharathiyar* (1936; Madras: Kalai Magal Kaariyaalayam, 1964).

him, he had had them by self. Stuck to his stylistics, he could observe that God had enabled him to get educated without undergoing education.[25] The reverse methodologists stuck, in turn, to Ramalinga's stylistics, have zealously margnisalised what all Ramalinga had learnt through the others.[26] Uran Adigal has gone to the extent of branding him as a *Saamu Siddha* inheriting the learning of previous births.[27] But given the extent of Ramalinga's knowledge of Tamil literature and grammar, *tarka* and *Siddhanthic Sasthras*, and *Vedantha,* one should not undermine the education Ramalinga had had under his brother first and then under Kanchipuram Maha Vidhwan Sabapathy Mudaliyar. It could be surmised that Ramalinga had more non-formal than formal education during childhood and that the follow up by self was quite amazing. The critics have also missed the crucial fact that Ramalinga's accompaniment of his brother during the discourses as 'text reader' was itself education for him in many ways. This was attested by his later emergence as discourse maker, independent of his brother.

The internal evidences have revealed the fact that the childhood sensations had produced a negative response in the unconscious mind of child Ramalingam. The cumulative negative response had transformed

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[25] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai,* op.cit., verse 2775, 3053, 4112, 4615, 5004.

[26] Mani Tirunavukkarasu Mudaliyar, "Ramalinga Swamigal Kalvi Karra Varalaaru", *Siddhantham,* Vol.1, No.9, Sept.1928.

[27] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit, p.35.

him into an indifferent child. Ramalinga has stated that, while he was a child, he was indifferent to mingling and playing with other children, allergic to food, averse to money, had unusually deep thinking of God and renunciation of life, and negation of the comfort of the feminine embracement.[28] These have not drawn adequate critical attention, for the reverse methodology faced no difficulty in explaining them off as expressions of extreme spirituality of the god-sent child. But when viewed from the angle of a human child, the indifference could be traced to the sensations which had caused it.

A normal child would only like to mingle and play with the other children. But when the objective alienating factors produced the sensation of isolation, the child would shrink within, being wiped out of all natural enthusiasm. Again a normal child would like to eat in an environment of love and joy. An environment breeding contempt and lovelessness would only produce the sensation of gloom allergic to eating. The child would normally have no sense of money but would play with the coins. When the possession of money produced the sensation of vanity and the lack of it produced the sensation of misery, the child became averse to money. Renunciation would be anathema to childhood but the horror sensations of the world could result in extraordinary metaphysical mental vibrations and aberrations. Any child would

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[28] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., verse 3392-3392, 3395-3396, 3440, 3454, 3484-3486, 3510.

normally long for embracement especially that of women, but the sensations produced by incomprehensible vulgarity of the external world could cause the dislike of the child towards the natural warmth of women's embracement in extreme cases. In the case of Ramalinga this has had a significant bearing on his future conduct and character.

The Awareness of the World or The Period of Sensitivity

Ramalinga has counted this phase of his life from the age of twelve to thirty five.[29] In worldly terms, this was the most productive period of his life. Most of self education occurred during the period and, at the close of it, Ramalinga had emerged as a reputed *Vidhwan* of his times, creating an awe even in the minds of such great personalities like Maha Vidhwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and Arumuga Navalar. The development embedded its own anti-thesis. The unconscious had begun to strike with force. Ramalinga occupying a separate room in the house must have occurred during this phase alone and not earlier.[30] The will to struggle and cope up with life characterised the second phase. *Kandha Kottam* symbolised the first phase whereas *Tiru Orriyur* became the center-stage of the second phase.

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[29] Ibid., verses 3535, 5041, 5042.

[30] The internal evidences have not been processed rationally. When the child had to sleep on the pial at night, the room could not have been allotted to him then. His own independent earning must have secured some independence for him. It has been narrated that the five months old child got the revelation at Chidambaram while the internal evidence has referred to it as having occurred at "an early age" only: *Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., verse 4133, Probably the family could have visited Chidambaram after migration to Chennai.

Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar became a disciple of Ramalinga in 1849 probably along with Irukkam Rathina Mudaliyar and others. Ramalinga had become 'Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai' with the publication of *Ozhivil Odukkam* in 1851. The *Sastra Vilakka Sangam* at Madras requested him and helped him, to write and publish *Manumurai Kanda Vaacagam* (in prose) in 1854. *Tonda Mandala Cadagam* was published in 1855. Ramalinga also published *Cinmaya Deepikai* in 1857. He had offered the dedicative verses for *Nista Anubhuthi* in 1852, *Chidambara Puraanam* in 1855 and *Nidhi Nul* in 1858. All the other intellectual correspondences had taken place during 1850 and 1858 only. The second phase had started in 1835 and Ramalinga became a well known scholar in 1850. The gap of fifteen long years would become crucial for the historiographers and sociological critics but not for the 'divine' theorists who have only filled in the gap with their divine episodes by applying the reverse methodology to Ramalinga's stylistic utterances. The point was that Ramalinga's emergence was not momentous but gradual.

During 1835 and 1850, the boy had grown into a mature adult. He conducted the religious or *puranic* discourses in elite families independently of his brother.[31] Having had the preliminary training under his brother and Maha Vidhwan Sabapathy Mudaliyar, it could

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[31] Mani Tirunavukkarasu Mudaliyar, op.cit.

have been easier for him to read Tamil literature, grammar and the *Siddhanthic Sastras* by himself. He could have also met and discussed things with the scholars. The internal evidences suggest that he had begun to teach the children too.[32] Ramalinga's Sermon Notes and the references in *Aaraam Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* have clearly vindicated that he was thorough with the logical prescriptions in Arul Nandhi Sivachariyar's *Siva Gnaana Siddhiyaar.*[33] *Manumurai Kanda Vaacagam* [1854] would reveal the qualitative change that had occurred in Ramalinga in delivering the discourses. It was almost a political symbol which later obtained its elaboration in *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* [1867-1874].[34]

Instead of receiving the sensations from the world, Ramalinga had begun to 'know' of the world through empirical perception. By himself he was experiencing 'his side' of life. He was then exposed to the 'other side' of life. Ramalinga was accustomed to hunger and neglect, if not insult. Before the Government recorded him as a *Paradesi* after his disappearance, he was almost so when he slept on the corridors of the *Tiru Orriyur* temple with an empty stomach or returned home to sleep on

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[32] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.Cit., verse 3445.

[33] Ibid., verses, 3503, 3527, 3913, 4175, 4586, 4587, 4615, 4654, 5515, 5699, 5703; Also refer *Urai Nadai Pagudi: Sermon notes,* op.cit, pp.248-336.

[34] Ramaligna had intended to organise the work in seven parts: as such the work has remained incomplete even with the third part. Hence it was his final work. See Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit, p.365. *Tiru Arutpa: Uranadai Pagudi*, op.cit, p.24.

the pial unnoticed. Ramalinga's stylistics would have it that God fed him on those occasions in the person of the temple priest or his mother or brother's wife.[35] The reality was only hunger and magic. According to Thomson, magic meant 'enacting in fantasy the fulfillment of the desired reality.'[36] Ramalinga, the teenage boy, thought that God would come to feed him and make him sleep, and he had slept. His sympathetic critics would not think for a while that God would not be so unmerciful after all to grant him "flesh tottering" punishment at *Tiru Orriyur* for having had food before temple entry.[37] It was Ramalinga's stylistics to have said so, but for the critics the reality of an unjust punishment at the temple meted out to an unprotected lad must remain comprehended.

The assignment of *Puranic* discourse making had exposed the 'other side' of life to Ramalinga. The lavish spending on eating, the pomp and luxury associated with the palanquin mobility, the music and dance to cheer the elite taking oil bath, their domesticated lust and vulgarity, and their 'unbearable look of arrogance, irritating behaviour and

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[35] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, Op.Cit., pp.61-63; Ibid., (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, Op.Cit. verses 1865: 176, 4132, 4137, 4138.

[36] George Thomson, *Religion*, (London, 1950), p.9:

> Magic rests on the principle that by creating the illusion that you control reality you can actually control it. In its initial stages it is simply mimetic. You want rain, so you perform a dance in which you mimic the gathering clouds, the thunderclap, and the falling shower. You enact in fantasy the fulfillment of the desired reality. In its later stages the mimetic act may be accompanied by a command, an imperative 'Rain!' ...

[37] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, Op.Cit., verse 1047, 1048; *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, Op.Cit., pp.63-65.

intolerable qualities' had a terrifying effect on him.[38] Ramalinga's crusade against the oppressive external milieu, inimical political conditions and cultural degeneration recorded in the *Aaraam*[Sixth] *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* had arisen from his experiences both at Chennai and Chidambaram. The point to be stressed here has been that, during the second phase, the said experiences had only struck 'fear and terror' in his mind.[39] He was afraid to sleep, for then they would haunt him in his dream.[40] He would lose his balance even during the day time and beat the students for which he would curse himself later.[41] He was not sure whether he would escape from falling a prey to the 'five great sins' at Chennai.[42] His intellectual mental make up was his shield against alienation. The fear psychosis had its counterpart in the form of the wild disputes in which he engaged himself egotistically.[43] With all these limitations he could gain the reputation as a *Vidhwan* as to make Maha Vidhwan Meenakshi Sundharam Pillai admit that he and Naavalar would have lost their positions if Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai had continued his vocation.[44] Fortunately for them that was not to be.

The role of the unconscious could have been more severe during the phase owing to the destablising conditions prevailing outside. The lad

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[38] Ibid., verses 3459, 3461.
[39] Ibid., verses 3467, 3478, 3481-3482, 3537.
[40] Ibid., verse 3443.
[41] Ibid., verse 3445.
[42] Ibid., verse 3447.
[43] Ibid., verses 3451, 3453.
[44] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., p.438.

was still quite indifferent. During the first phase, he had thrown away the money on those who gave it; during the second, he threw it into the drainage and wells and ponds, probably when they had left.[45] He did not move with many in his age group; but the few friends he had had would also leave him unable to cope up with his mental make up.[46] He ate little and always wished that he should look lean; he would close the entire body with cloth, for he was conscious that the people should not get disturbed of a fattened body when they were starving.[47] The aversion to the female embracement developed by the unconscious would aggravate during the phase, for he had seen the plight of women 'inviting' men without the sense of chastity.[48] He had avoided them but was not angry with them.[49] The contradiction between the unconscious and conscious came to the surface when he was married to Dhanammal, but he had resolved it by reading *Tiru Vaacagam* throughout the first night and leaving her at that stage for which he would bleed in his mind in the later years as has been recorded in *Aaraam Tirumurai.*[50]

Ramalinga's publications, his contacts with the *Vedanthist*s and *Vira Saivite* Brahmins would bear testimony to the *Gnana Vairaakya* or 'mute wisdom' that he had developed as a shell to shrink within and feel

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[45] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., verse 3395, 3396, 3454.
[46] Ibid., verse 3404.
[47] Ibid., verses 3397, 3449, 3460.
[48] Ibid., verse 3392, 3437, 3462.
[49] Ibid., verse 3462.
[50] Ibid., verse 3453; *Urai Nadai Pagudi*, op.cit, pp.57, 68.

secure. This could not continue for long, for the "evil ridden Chennai"[51] had caused such horrendous experiences of "mental break down, fear, breath taking shiver, torture and pains" that "could not be attempted in prose or rhyme."[52] With the avowed hope that he would not fall a prey to the evils of urban life and get his mind shrunk in emptiness, Ramalinga left for *Karunguzhi* at Chidambaram in 1858 when India had come under the *Raj.* Both were historic, but constituted the two poles of a dialectic.

The whole thing could be viewed from a different angle. The sympathetic critics of Ramalinga have evolved a convenient pattern for explaining his attitude to sex and exit from Chennai deriving inspiration from the divinity theory. For them Ramalinga had formed the *Tiruvaacagam* identity which was a powerful subjective shield against the probable external stimuli acting on the senses. Ramalinga was thus saved by the *Butha ganas* of Lord Siva from being drawn into the worldly binding.[53] Objectively Chennai could not provide the suitable environment for the promotion of Ramalinga's self imposed ethic. The resolution of the conflict between Ramalinga's psyche and the objective realities of Chennai was effected by his exit of Chennai to the citadel of spirituality, Chidambaram. But the picture would reveal itself to be quite simple and naïve.

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[51] Ibid., verse 3467.

[52] Ibid., verses 3467, 3478, 3481-3482, 3537.

[53] *Urai Nadai pagudi*, op.cit, p.68.

The unconscious acting on the conscious and fettering the sexual behavioural pattern of a person would produce a depressed state of mind. Scientifically the alternative to such a depressed state could not be the *bakthi* trait which would only cause aggravation but only a mind-easing atmosphere of joy and commitment. Ramalinga's aversion to embracement by women had started 'acting' on him since childhood. During youth it acted against the sexual urge. But the physique could not be controlled and it produced hallucinations. Ramalinga attempted to suppress it through the *bakthi* trait of *Tiruvaacagam.* This could not go on forever and the real alternative was to secure the free play of the conscience over the urges through practical action that would stimulate the blossoming of the mind in various dimensions.

Replacing the dialectic between Ramalinga's psyche and the external world by that between Ramalinga's self imposed ethic working along the lines of the unconscious and the physique producing hallucinations against the said ethic would not undermine the personality of Ramalinga but could only grant him his self and youth. To rely exclusively on Ramalinga's stylistics in this regard has led to his projection as an *Avathar* deputed by God to go around the world for a defined period and prevented by God himself from falling a prey to earthly sins. But the internal evidences would contradict the sin theory,

for in a letter, Ramalinga had prescribed sex twice a month.[54] Also, the reference to a woman playing violently on him once and God consoling him on that count would vindicate the fact that Ramalinga had the experience of hallucinations caused by the youthful physique.[55]

The Critical Re-entry into Life or the Period of Sensitisation

For Ramalinga, the change of place was due to the grace of God.[56] On his part he had wandered like a "market dog",[57] was tired, and desired rest.[58] The rest was not to be secured, for he was "drawn into the streets",[59] this time not as an uprooted plant but to 'play' in the world, to make interventions and 'transform' with a "pity in the soul" called *uyir irukkam*[60] that was the "joy I had found out"[61] and because of which he could become the "great elder" or *Periyavar* for the people. This 'great elder' was the predecessor of 'St.Ramalinga' and the transformation was not magical but a 'process' involving human interactions.[62]

Applying his own stylistics, Ramalinga would thank God for "not educating me formally first, then educating me next, and awakening me

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[54] Ibid., p.377.
[55] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., verse 3391, 4136.
[56] Ibid., verse 3683.
[57] Ibid., verse 3844.
[58] Ibid., verses 3482, 3710-3719.
[59] Ibid., verses 3310, 3506-3509, 3710, 3714, 3718, 3719.
[60] Ibid., verse 3508.
[61] Ibid., verse 3675.
[62] Ibid., verse 3400.

(at last)".[63] This reference has been crucial, for Ramalinga had mentioned all the three phases of his life together for the first time, attributing each stage with its chief characteristic. First, formal education was not availed by him during childhood. The second stage was characterised by his vigorous learning either by self or in contact with scholars of eminence. The third stage was marked by his spiritual awakening and critical re-entry into life. Elsewhere in many verses of the Sixth *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa,* Ramalinga has recorded the fact that he got enlightened of the world at Chidambaram.[64] His stylistics would make him view the transformation as the dispensation of Lord Siva. But his other references would bear testimony to the 'process' by which the transformation had occurred.

The exposure to the oppressive external worldly situation during the second phase had revealed the truth to Ramalinga that no homogeneity prevailed among the people but only the divisions of the superiors and inferiors and that worldly life was subjected to the interests of the former category.[65] He had observed that luxury, joy and happiness belonged to the pleasure privileged social classes and that fear and misery characterised the plight of the poor.[66] Chastity had become a commodity in urban life and Ramalinga could visualise the plight of

[63] Ibid., verse 4891.
[64] Ibid., verses 3413, 3415, 3527.
[65] Ibid., verses 3463, 4050, 4082, 5296, 5298.
[66] Ibid., verse 5382.

women who were found 'inviting' men for money.[67] That he was not angry with them could reveal the fact that Ramalinga had started developing a social ethic as against the religious. Ramalinga had also been exposed to the plight of the rural people when he wandered day and night in the suburban villages before leaving Chennai.[68] *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam* [1854] was symbolic in the sense that it revealed the perception of Ramalinga that all was not well with the 'State of Denmark' and that many innocent calves were being crushed under the wheels of the chariot. That Ramalinga had finally developed an aversion to *tarka* and *Vaadha* and begun to rely on empirical perception involving the *nethras* or eyes was a clear pointer to the realisation that the *Sasthras* which he had zealously mastered could not explain to him the dynamic of contemporary life.[69] His aversion to money was also a reaction against the money power system, though not conscious. All the above data would converge on the point that Ramalinga's mind was not a *tabula rasa* when he arrived at Chidambaram and that it would be wrong to presume that the transformation occurred suddenly or was due to divine revelation. The process of enlightenment had already commenced.

Ramalinga has stated that at Chidambaram he had developed the 'intention' to make social interventions as he 'could not reconcile' with

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[67] Ibid., verses 3392, 3437, 3462.

[68] Ibid., verses 3467, 3478, 3481, 3482.

[69] Ibid., verses 3451, 3453.

the given state of affairs anymore.[70] He was drawn into the worldly activities and was 'on the streets'.[71] He was called to 'play' in the world which he called *ulakil aadal.*[72] According to Ramalinga the entry into the streets did not occur for the 'material benefits' or *vidaya kaadal* but from "the pity in the soul for the fellow humans."[73] His purpose was to 'remove the fear' in the minds of the people.[74] The intervention was the 'joy' he had invented. Ramalinga was hesitant to define the said interventions as due to "divine will, fate or illusion".[75] The inference was that Ramalinga had 'acted before he 'thought' testifying to the assertion that human consciousness preceded human action and revolutionary consciousness preceded revolutionary human action or practice. The earlier passivity slogan of "what thou hath ordered I shall abide"[76] was being revised by Ramalinga himself.

The internal evidences, especially the letters from and to Ramalinga, have revealed the quantum and pattern of interventions.[77] To start with, the intervention took the form of guidance, counseling and consolation.[78] Ramalinga was invited to the houses and had begun to

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[70] Ibid., verse 3408.
[71] Ibid., verses 3310, 3506-3509, 3710, 3714, 3718, 3719.
[72] Ibid., verse 3508.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., verse 3403.
[75] Ibid., verses 3710-3719.
[76] Ibid., verse 3390.
[77] Uran Adigal, (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Urai nadai Pagudi*, op.cit., pp.363-420, 471-492.
[78] Ibid., pp.366-367, 377, 417.

settle family feuds and disputes.[79] He had a medical mission too as he was well versed in Siddha and domestic systems of medicine.[80] He would also try to help those pursuing education.[81] He began to borrow money and help the sufferers.[82] He would intervene in the matters concerning debt burden arising from the cunning practices of the exploitative moneylender.[83] He was drawn towards the plight of the small peasants who had no plough and hence maintained one for the common use of the villagers.[84] Finally he had started rescuing the innocent victims from police harassment and torture.[85]

For Ramalinga, there was the initial fear about "what will be the consequence of my intentions?"[86] In line with his stylistics, later on he had stated that he had obtained the 'sanction' from Siva.[87] The verses in *Aaraam Tirumurai,* which have recorded these intentions, have been crucial in vindicating the transformation being undergone by Ramalinga who had then become the *Periyavar* or 'great elder':

> With the hurdles gone and path cleared
> With all the good of life ensured
> The human souls to dwell in joy
> Intended thou hath and thou shall get
> All that intended by thee in mind (3679)

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[79] Ibid., p.366.
[80] Ibid., p.388.
[81] Ibid., p.364.
[82] Ibid., p.371, 379-380, 392, 394, 398, 405.
[83] Ibid., p.456.
[84] Ibid., p.384.
[85] Ibid., p.415.
[86] *Aaraam Tirumurai,* op.cit., verse 3675.
[87] Ibid., verses 3413, 3415, 3527, 3674.

Playest thou for ever without fear!
Give unto thee the command of Gracious Light!
We will not let thee down, let thee down,
Our command! (3676, 3680)

Providing happiness to others in the world
The words thou shall utter in command
The *Maha Vaakyas* of Ours shall they be
With love playest thee anywhere as you wish! (3679)

From this day onwards, as thou shall intend,
Playest thee to achieve and be happy (3680)

This is the moment for all the good to secure (4878)

Don't shake
All the days henceforth shall be happy days (4879)

Thou shall not hiccup anymore thou shall see (4296)

I was landed on the other side (4517)

Ramalinga had admitted that he had crossed over from the side of non-stop hiccup to the other side of smooth breath, from the sphere of fear and misery to that of hope and happiness, and from the position of utterance in wilderness to that of pronouncing the *Maha Vaakyas* of human emancipation. The switch over was qualitative and it should inevitably by hypothesised that there must have been a powerful intervening variable to effect the change. This must have been the colonial agrarian conditions. Ramalinga lived at *Karunguzhi* for nine years [1858-1867] at *Vadalur* for three years [1867-1870] and at *Mettu Kuppam* or *Siddhi Valaagam* for four years [1870-1874] respectively. He had stopped communicating with others during the *Siddhi Valaagam*

stage and hence his letters have been assigned to the twelve year period of his stay at *Karunguzhi* and *Vadalur.* These twelve years constituted the period of mass interaction and consequent transformation in the life of Ramalinga. The contextualisation of Ramalinga and his movement would not be possible without comprehending the twelve year mass interaction period, for learning from the masses would be no sin, as Mao Tse Tung told Edgar Snow that he could shed all his inhibitions only after identifying with the masses.[88]

Ramalinga had been exposed to the cruelties of urban life under the colonial dispensation. Urban life would not enlighten him, for he was a *lumpan* and had the least chance of perceiving the dynamics of socio-economic and political changes that were going on during his stay at Madras. Urbanism had produced only the modernizing elite and even Veda Nayagam Pillai from the rural stock could not come out of it until 1878.[89] Should the internal evidences be an indicator, the impact of urbanism remained restricted to escapism or fleeing away, death wish, shrinking into self, utopian solace, schizophrenia, psychic imbalance and moral depravity. With the intention of not falling a prey to either of them, Ramalinga had chosen the least harmful way of fleeing away, not with an

[88] Edgar, Snow, *The Red Star Over China*, 1937; Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1973. p.279.

[89] The change from the Mutt-centred to people-centred outlook occurred because of the 1877 famine of the Tamil, '*Taadhu*' year; see A Seenivasa Raghavan, *Oru Nurraandu Tamizh Kavidhai* (Coimbatore: Mercury Book Company, 1970). The 1877 famine covered an area of 200,000 square miles and affected thirty six million people; A.R.Desai (ed) *Peasant Struggles in India* (New Delhi: OUP 1979), p.49.

escapist tendency but to keep up the morale, and he had chosen the right place and direction too.

Karunguzhi and *Vadalur* were small peasants predominated areas. The rural people had no pretensions. They would brave any inimical condition with extreme sustainability and tolerance. Living in village communities, they had had sharing relations which, in turn, constituted their unity in a hierarchical system. The colonial rule had uprooted this unity and introduced money relations into the rural economy as a result of which majority of the cultivators had lost their customary rights over the land, turned tenants, became indebted to money lenders, were evicted and nomadised.[90] The artisans and handicraftsmen were enslaved along with the agrestic labourers even by law.[91] The drain and de-industrialisation had caused havoc.[92] The recurrent famines

[90] Kathleen Gough, "Indian Peasant Uprisings" *Peasant Struggles in India*, ed. A.R.Desai (New Delhi: OUP 1979, p.89).

The British land settlements for the first time made land private property of a capitalist kind. The new landlords included zamindars who had previously been revenue collectors under the Moghuls, a variety of princes or subordinate rulers, village headmen, military tenants, religious or secular functionaries of former governments, in some cases peasant cultivators who had hitherto merely leased land under customary regulation, and in other cases merchants or moneylenders who bought land rights, along with the right to collect revenue, in government auctions when previous revenue collectors proved unable to bring in the tax. While such person gained private land ownership, the lower ranks of cultivating tenants, village servants and serfs lost their hereditary rights to work and to share the produce of village lands, and could be evicted, if their landlords found them unnecessary, recalcitrant or unable to pay their rents.

[91] Irfan Habib "Studying a Colonial Economy without Perceiving Colonialism":, *Social Scientist*, Vol.12, No.12, Dec.1984, pp.3-27.

[92] Ibid., V.B.Kulkarni, *British Dominion in India and After* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1964); P.N.Chopra et al, *A Social Cultural and Economic History of India*, Vol.3 (New Delhyi: Macmillan India, 1974); Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (1901: London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1908); K.Rajayyan, *History of Madurai:* 1736-1801 (Madurai University Press, 1974); K.N.Chaudhuri (ed) *Economic Development of India under the East India Company* (Cambridge, 1971; Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Dharmakumar, (ed) *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol.2, (New Delhi: OUP, 1984).

aggravated the plight of peasants.[93] Even religion stood monopolised by the elite classes.[94] Caste rigidity produced caste tensions.[95] Religion, Varna, Kula and Caste became insignia of power. Western education, employment and alliance with the *Circar* had contributed heavily to this polarisation.[96] The early forms of peasant uprisals were also in the offing.[97] All these developments could not be dealt with in this chapter elaborately. Here it would suffice to point out that Ramalinga was exposed to the devastating rural conditions and alarming plight of the small peasants against the backdrop of the colonial hegemony. He had begun to concretize the situation in the Sixth *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* as a polemic against the given state of affairs. A logician as he was, he turned into an empiricist, for according to him, what the eyes revealed to him was plain fact which needed no inferential processes through the perception of the other senses or reference to the other sources of

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[93] Suranjan Chatterjee, "Economic History or an Apologia for Colonialism", *Social Scientist*, No.140 Jan.1985, pp.54-70; He has stated that between 1850 and 1900 there were seven famines causing the loss of 15,00,000 lives and between 1850 and 1900 there were 24 famines sweeping away 3,10,00,000 lives. Dutt, Op.cit mentioned the famines of 1877, 1878, 1889, 1892, 1897 and 1900 taking away fifteen million lives. V.B.Kulkarni, op.cit, has referred to the famines of 1837, 1860, 1869, 1874 and 1877. N.G. Ranga et al, "Agrarian Revolts", *Peasant Struggles in India*, Op.cit., pp.48-50; refer to the famines of 1876-1878, 1888-1889, 1891, 1896 and 1899 Also see F.N.89.

[94] The Pallava bakthi Paradigm was inclusive whereas during the nineteenth century "you eater of the cow, Pulaiyas. Do you deserve the Maarkali or 'Dhanur' virata?" had become the religious dictum of the landed elite classes prohibiting the *Nandhans* from the main stream: Gopala Krishna Bharathi; *Nandhanaar Carittra Kirttanai* (1861:Chennai: Rathina Nayakar and sons, n.d)pp.27,29-30,33,40,62, 73.

[95] R.Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891* (The University of Arizona Press, 1974).

[96] Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century, (1968; Cambridge University Press, 1971).

[97] Atis Dasgupta "Early Trends of Anti Colonial Peasant Resistance in Bengal", *Social Scientist*, vol.14, No.4, Apl.1986, pp.20-32.

knowledge.[98] The situation was so miserable that Ramalinga was cautious that none of his actions should add to the misery of the people.[99] He had oriented his life-style to fit into the process without causing alienation. He had turned optimistic and decided to give the lead. He had earlier observed with pain that 'none of the passing days is a happy day."[100] After the transformation he could assert that Lord Siva had consoled him not to shake, for "all the days henceforth shall be happy days."[101]

Tonal Variation and Change of Strategy

Karunguzhi-Vadalur life had not only transformed Ramalinga but caused a tonal variation and change of strategy in him. This was more due to the peasant-based approach than what Ramalinga's stylistics would attribute the divine sanction. He had developed a commanding tone and begun to be assertive. It is common knowledge that the peasants would usually swear and use a commanding language to bind others in the rural community. Ramalinga could then understand the difference in the levels of understanding of the people and that no rigid stand would help. His defence of worship and opposition to the *Brahmo Samajists* emanated from the vantage point of his association with the

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[98] *Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit, verse 5515.
[99] Ibid., verse 3389.
[100] Ibid., verse 3388.
[101] Ibid., verse 4879.

rural people.[102] For Marx, religion was the 'rim of the vale of tears' and that the alternative to religion was not atheism but the creation of meaningful social relations which would gradually efface the myths.[103] Ramalinga did not want to deprive the people of their only solace, idol worship. He relied on the relative *Pakkuva* of the people and hence conscientisation and not condemnation became his strategy for the upliftment of the people.[104] His ultimate definition of God as the 'Supreme Light of Grace' or *Arul Perum Jothi* amounted to a tactical move to unite the people cutting across religious barriers. He had attempted to create a secular platform.

The re-interpretation of the Saivite tenets to suit his new mission was a new strategy adopted by Ramalinga. Uran Adigal has dealt with the new interpretation of the four margas which had replaced God by the human souls.[105] *Dhasa Marga* would enslave the souls; *Satputra Marga* would develop fatherly affection for them; *Saha Marga* would ensure comradeship; and *Sanmarga* would facilitate total identity with the people. The God centered margas were thus re-interpreted as humanity centred. In his interpretation of the universal-secular-invocatory epigram

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[102] *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., pp.296-303.

[103] Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction* (1844) in *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p.39.

[104] *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit., pp.303, 308.

[105] Ibid., p.283.

Ulagelaam, Ramalinga negated the authority of the 'Vedas' and *Aagamas* on the ground that the latter was bound to the *Varnashrama* system.[106] This was not accidental, for, at last in 1872, he had removed the Vedic attribute from all the institutions he had created.[107] However, the evolution of this strategy involved fluctuating steps.

Sanmarga meant the total identity with the people as fellow humans. For the Jivas to attain the status of *Sanmargists*, conscientisation was to be effected. That in turn necessitated organizational intervention. Hence Ramalinga sponsored the *Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangha* in 1865 as a movement for practicing *Sanmarga*.[108] For Ramalinga the Vedas were 'works of wisdom' and what was needed was a *Samarasa Veda* or *Podhu Veda* of wisdom.[109] That he had attempted to write the *Podhu Veda* himself but later dropped the move revealed his strategy of consolidating the *Sangha* first.[110] Uran Adigal has unearthed the fact that Ramalinga had valued the *Sangha* high and above everything else and made it sponsor all the other institutions – *Samarasa Veda Dharma Saalai* [1867], *Sanmarga Bhodhini Paada Saalai* [1867], *Samarasa Veda Paada Saalai* [1872], and *Sattiya Gnaana Sabhai* [1872].[111] All the Vedic attributes were removed in 1872

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106 Ibid., pp.252-253.
107 Ibid., p.522.
108 Ibid., p.285, *Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., verse 3406.
109 Ibid., p.286.
110 Ibid., pp.286-287.
111 Ibid., p.289.

and Ramalinga had begun his crusade against institutionalised formal religions, *varna, kula* and caste and all the *Dharmas, Sasthras* and *Puranas* associated with them.

The Sangha Revolution

The invention of the *Sangha* [1865] was crucial. It could alone explain Ramalinga's hectic and tireless interventions in the problems concerning the people during 1866 as revealed by his letters.[112] He could not fix his place of rest himself as he was drawn hither and thither by the people who had become members of the *Sangha.*[113] Besides sponsoring the other organsiations, the *Sangha* had inspired the publication of the *Tiru Arutpa*: First Volume in 1867. The cumulative effect of the *Sangha* and the publication of *Tiru Arutpa* was the precipitation of the *Arutpa-Marutpa* controversy in 1868. Hence the significance of the origin of the *Sangha* would demand critical scrutiny in historical perspectives.

Uran Adigal has rightly perceived the fact that Ramalinga sponsored a *Sangha* and not a Mutt, but he has missed to understand the historic significance of the move.[114] For him, the Mutt was meant for those who had renounced life and those who had been spiritually upgraded, while the *Sangha* was meant for all. It was not merely the

[112] *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., p.396.

[113] Ibid., p.381.

[114] *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., p.285.

difference between a religious and secular institution but a religious institution and 'movement'. This was the crux of the issue mostly left unnoticed by contemporary historiography. The origin of the 'Mutts' would throw light on this.

The Chola political authority had begun to decline during the late Chola period [1150-1279]. The Brahmin secular authority had also begun to decrease with the decline of the *Brahmadeyas*. Large merchant organizations operating at the inter-regional level had come to stay wielding political influence. The itinerant merchant guilds had begun to exercise greater control over the movement of goods through the militarized *Eri Vira Pattanas*. Temple-centred urbanization had precipitated the emergence of the powerful *Idangai* groups of the *Kaikkolar* and *Kammalar*. The *Taanattaar* of the temples were more integrated to the commercial network than those of the *Sabhas*. It was for the then dominant partner of the ruling class, the *Vellalas* of the *Naadus* to emerge as the *Periya Naattaar* to order the "elements of the earliest period of agrarian integration."[115] For Burton Stein, the emergence of the *Periya Naattaar* was an "important further development of South Indian segmentary society."[116] Finally there appeared a distinctive 'sub-culture' corresponding to the 'new ruling classes' within

[115] Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, (1980:New Delhi,OUP,1985) p.216.

[116] Ibid., p.233.

the prevailing Brahmanical order, more specifically witnessed by the emergence of Siddhanthic Saivism, the Vaisnavism of Ramanuja, the Mutts as parallel educational centers and the introduction of the female deities in Vedic temples. Subsequent history witnessed the strengthening of the 'Mutts' through land grants by the *Vellalas*.[117] During the nineteenth century they had emerged as big landed institutions of *Vellala* dominance. What has to be essentially understood would be that the 'Mutts' belonged to the landed non-Brahmin classes of the *Sat-Sudras* whose ritual status attained through the *Siddhanthic Sasthras*, had placed them on par with the Brahmins, if not above. Herein lay the significance of Ramalinga's movement.

One should make a clear distinction between those who were the 'close' associates of Ramalinga and those who were actually 'led' by him. His close associates were the *Vellalas*, while those who were led by him mostly belonged to the small peasants of *Sudra* status. That they were made the *Saadhus* of the *Sangha* was not a mere fact but the proclamation of a 'new Dharma' similar to the Lutheran Revolution.

For Marx,

> Luther...overcame the bondage of piety by replacing it by the bondage of conviction. He shattered faith in authority because he restored the authority of faith. He turned priests into laymen because he turned laymen into priests. He freed man from outer religiosity because he made religiosity the

[117] The Mackenzie Collections bear evidence. see.T.N. Subramanian (ed.)*South Indian Temple Inscriptions,* 3 Vols. (Madras Govt. Oriental series No.157) (Madras 1953-1957).

> inner man. He freed the body from chains because he enchained the heart.[118]

It could be inferred that the conversion of the *Pacis* [People belonging to Vanniar Community] into *Saadhus* of the *Sanmarga* Movement not only conferred on them *Sat Sudra* status but must have fomented 'danger' for the land owning classes. The 'danger to the physique' alarm raised by Ramalinga in some of his letters to his associates and the advice to 'brave' them must be essentially understood in this context.[119]

Critical scrutiny would reveal the fact that Ramalinga began to feel the 'friction' once he had started re-interpreting the tenents, evolved the *Samarasa Veda* concept, elaborated the programme of *Sanmarga* and launched the *Sangha*. The friction at times embarrassed him, for he was exalted as a *Swami* with divine powers, or called with the epithet *Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar* meaning 'the man of sparkling divine grace'. He firmly resisted the reference to *Swami* and had actually banned it. But he could not do anything when Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar had silently made the second reference in *Tiru Arutpa* [1867]. The grammatical punch which Ramalinga had played with the second reference revealed both his irritation and disapproval. The friction of this type ceased against disagreement, but became a menace after his disappearance in 1874.

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[118] Karl Marx, op.cit., p.46.
[119] *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., p.417.

The second type of friction had arisen in the context of the relationship of his close associates with the others in the *Sangha*. In one of his letters, Ramalinga could make an explicit comment that those who has 'chosen to be with him' had 'come to exercise authority or power' and that, being 'poor' he 'should remain in isolation and be careful.'[120] This would explain Ramalinga's reference to the capabilities of Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar in explaining the meaning of human existence to the *Saadhus* 'to the extent possible in human effort', meaning that the truth in its entirety could not become comprehensible to 'mere intellect' as it involved many other things.[121] The audience could have received what he wanted to convey at the very beginning of his sermon. That Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar had joined Ramalinga after testing his caliber being true, the sarcasm could mean an irritation caused by the reinterpretation of Ramalinga's interpretations themselves in his absence.[122] One could not exaggerate the friction to the level of counteraction. Ramalinga's level of consciousness and identification with the people could not be matched by his associates and disciples and hence it could be possible that some of their activities carried out in innocence embarrassed him. To avoid this, Ramalinga ultimately took up the flag and revealed himself explicitly to all.

[120] Ibid., p.418.

[121] Ibid., p.351.

[122] *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., pp.66-67.

The Arupta – Marutpa Controversy

With the publication of *Poli Arutpa Maruppu* by Arumuga Navalar in 1868 and its counter by Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudlaiyar, the *Arutpa-Maruppa* controversy had erupted and it lasted for nearly twenty five years.[123] Not that Arumuga Navalar was restless with Ramalinga's emergence as a leader but that he could not tolerate the songs of the latter being called as *Tiru Arutpa* comprising of the *Tirumurais* and Ramalinga himself being called as 'Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar.'[124] The crux of the problem, hitherto unstated, was that Navalar could not digest the *Sudras* being organised by Ramalinga chanting the songs of the latter, acquiring *Saadhu* status with 'their' knowledge of the Six *Tirumurais* and becoming eligible co-sharers of the *Sat Sudra* status. This was a prophesy of doom for the land owning classes. While the 'Mutts' tightened their activities, closed ranks against Vaisnavism and attempted to arm themselves with the *Twelve Tirumurais* and *Fourteen Siddhanthic Sasthras* to monopolise the religion-cultural sphere on the non Brahmin platform,[125] there had arisen a great alarm forecasting the erosion of their economic and social base with the mobilisation of the *Sudra* peasants through the *Sangha*, their ideological equipment with the theory of *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* and their consequent elevation to

[123] Mudaliyar's counter was not immediate; see *Urainadai Pagudi*, Op.Cit., pp.482-483.
[124] Ibid., pp.455-457.
[125] Mylai Seeni Venkataswamy, *Pattonpataam Nurrandil Tamizh Ilakkiyam* (1800-1900), Tiruchi: Alagappa Puthaga Nilayam, 1962, pp.76-87.

Saadhuhood [Sainthood] thus making them eligible competitors for *Sat Sudra* status. The controversy would unravel its secrets only when viewed in class terms. That the initial phase of the *Arutpa-Marutpa* controversy was more centred on the *Sangha* than *Tiru Arutpa-1* [1867] itself, for the controversial *Aaraam* [Sixth] *Tirumurai* had not been published at all until 1885.

The Problem of Deciphering the Meaning

Any researcher would have to confront great difficulty in deciphering the real meaning of the episodes in-built into the last part of Ramalinga's life at *Vadalur* and *Siddhi Valaagam* during 1867-1874. On the one hand Ramalinga's qualitative elevation occurred with hectic pace. The songs of the *Sixth Tirumurai* were written during the period. Ramalinga had started writing his *magnum opus* in prose, *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* in a phased manner from 1867 and the work remained incomplete in 1874. Ramalinga deliberately occupied the *Thiru Maaligai* of the Vaisnavite *Acaryas* at *Mettu Kuppam* when the Saiva Mutts were tightening their approach towards Vaisnavism with a view to claiming absolute monopoly in the religio-cultural sphere.[126] At the same time, Ramalinga removed the Vedic attribute from the names of all the institutions he had sponsored. The *Samarasa Veda Paada Saalai* had earlier been created for the further conversion of the younger *Saadhus*

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[126] *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., pp.472-473.

into cadres of the *Sangha* meant for propagation of the movement and its spread elsewhere.[127]

Ramalinga had, during the period, given final shape to the philosophy of *Sanmarga* with its components of *Jiva Kaarunya* or 'humanitarian action for the emancipation of the *Jivas, Saagaatha Kalvi* or 'education for deathlessness', *Maranam Illa Peru Vaazhvu* or 'supreme life without death', and *Cettaarai Ezhuppudhal* or 'arousing the dead to life.' It was a monistic philosophy which ultimately stressed the need for *Orumai kadavul* [unity of God], *Orumai Samayam* [Unity of Religions] and *Orumai Ulagiyal* [Unity of human existence]. The *Sabhai* was sponsored for the common worship of all cutting across all hurdles to unity. Ramalinga could engage himself in a dialogue with Christianity and it had had its impact in the formulation of the concepts for the common religion he advocated. The 'new look' of his *Saivism* had invited the wrath of the orthodoxies. Ramalinga neither gave up Siva nor dropped the zeal to create the new symbols of a common secular religion. He could silence the critics with the assertion that the *Aandavar* of his was not the *Karttar* of the Testaments, implying both Christianity and Islam.[128] Navalar could not be convinced, for he had had bitter experiences with Christianity in matters connected with the translation of the *Bible* into

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[127] Ibid., pp.287, 481-482,This was interpreted as a journal later on by Bala Krishna Pillai vide *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., p.39.

[128] *Urainadai Pagudi*, p.431.

Tamil by Peter Percival at Jaffna.[129] Finally in his *Vinnappams* [Prayers], and *Upadesas* [Sermons] at *Siddhi Valaagam*, Ramalinga could openly come out with his theory of negation and affirmation with respect to his philosophy and movement.

Many data need proper placement in this context. These data have been provided by some of his contemporaries and biographers and deserve critical scrutiny.[130] Confronting the 'people oriented evolution' hypothesis, these data offer the 'yogic evolution' or *Siddha* origin conceptual frameworks. Many stories were being floated during the last phase that Ramalinga had transformed into a *Siddha* of miracle potentials, having been able to convert 'dry' into 'wet' cultivation, and sand into gold. He was branded as a yogi who had obtained the *Suddha deha* which could not be destroyed. It was propagated that he could easily make himself unknown and re-appear, as he desired, later on. Sundara Swamigal [1831-1878] the *guru* of Sundaram Pillai, could not argue anything before Ramalinga, came out, and declared that Ramalinga had the yogic powers of grabbling the intellect of anybody who appeared before him.[131] Dhandapani Swamigal [1839-1898] met Ramalinga thrice and told the latter in person that he was the *avathar* or

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[129] J.P.Jeya Kumar, "Ramalingarum Veda Nayagarum" *Kiruttava Tamizh Vedagamattin Samuga Panpattu Thakkam: Or Aayvu* (Tamil) unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Bharathidasan University, 1994).
[130] Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru, op.cit., pp.471-596.
[131] Ibid., pp.424-425

incarnation of St.Thayumanavar.[132] After the disappearance of Ramalinga in 1874, Dhandapani Swamigal declared that the former would comeback to life.[133] Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar only re-asserted it before the Theosophical society later on. There arose a gossip that a 'great miracle' was to occur soon which was countered by Ramalinga that the people should 'carefully' adhere to the works assigned to them without being affected by such propaganda. By way of regulating things, Ramalinga had closed the *Sabhai* in 1873. Earlier he had to warn those in *Saalai* in 1872 against the disturbing trends which were bound to cause hardship for "both sides:,[134] Uran Adigal has taken it to refer to a difference of opinion between Ramalinga and those at *Saalai*, but considering the whole episode leading to the closure of the *Sabhai*, the reference could be understood in terms of the hurdles put forth to the march of Ramalinga and 'his' people by the 'disruptors' of peace. While informing his disciples that he would not be 'at their sight' for some time, he had advised them not to have any 'fear' over that.[135] This would repudiate the yogic theory. His final announcement that "God will not make me seen" once the doors were closed could also be interpreted to mean that "God will not betray me"[136] Should that be conceded, the question that would inevitably arise would be "to whom?"

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[132] Ibid., pp.426-431.
[133] Ibid., p.431.
[134] *Urainadai pagudi*, op.cit., p.434.
[135] Ibid., p.429.
[136] Ibid., p.438.

The meaning of all the above could either indicate a 'forecast' or point to the 'preparation' for the 'final event'. That the publication of the *Aaraam* [sixth] *Tirumurai* got delayed until 1885 would contradict the forecast theory. To state that Ramalinga had delayed it would also raise doubts as to whether it was a self-imposed ban by Ramalinga or a ban on Ramalinga himself in his own name. The available evidences do not point to a clear direction. But what was clear was that the publication of the *Aaraam* [Sixth] *Tirumurai* in 1885 triggered or was accompanied by, the second phase of the controversy with changed actors and motives as has been dealt with in detail by K.MohanRam.[137]

Contextualisation of the Movement

Ramalinga's association with the peasants was clear. To how much he was 'peasantised' and to what extent he had made 'interventions' have been matters of neglect in Ramalinga studies. Without an indepth analysis in this respect, the critics have attempted to place him within the modern sociological constructs by pushing the data within rather than unearthing the construct from the data themselves scientifically. Dogmatism has replaced objectivity in most of the studies.

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[137] K.Mohan Ram, "The Sat-Sudra Caste Factor in the Controversy over St.Ramalingam's Arutpa" paper presented to the 47th Session of the *Indian History Congress* at Srinagar, October 1986.

The treatment of Ramalinga's movement as a *Saivite* Revivalist Movement has negated all the empirical connections, space and time.[138] This theory has not explained the relevance of revivalism in historical perspectives. Also, it would not make things clear with respect to the form and functioning of 'Moribund *Saivism*' which the said Revivalism attempted to replace.

The liberal definition of the movement as a spiritual Unity Movement has effected a historical continuum by projecting it as the 'link' between the end of polygar armed revolt and the emergence of the National Liberation Movement.[139] The movement has thus been interpreted as a preparatory action for the later participatory action. But this theory would be found to have missed the specifics of the actual movement and the paradigm. It would not explain as to what made the difference between Ramalinga and his contemporary religious reformers. The definition has come to stay more because of convenience than clarity.

The socio-historic critics have started unearthing in Ramalinga's Movement the Proto-Non-Brahman Self Respect Movement, the earlier praxis of the depressed classes and the earlier voices of modern scientific

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[138] Kungilium PL. Shamuganar, *Dayavu Uruva Arulaala Tamizh Maganaar* (1987; Madras: Vallalar Gurukulam, 1989).
[139] M.P.Sivagnanam, *Vallalar Kanda Orumai Paadu* (1962; Madras: Poongodi Pathippagam, 1998).

socialism.[140] They have thrown light on the 'human core' of the Movement but have chosen to be the 'failure' theorists, thereby imposing the 'success' of their pet movements negatively and retrospectively on that of Ramalinga. They have attributed the failure to the 'religious core' of the movement which had mystified the programme, made it look like occultism and failed to grip the masses. The reality of the movement was that it was not so fragmented after all but only constituted a unity.

Prime facie, Ramalinga's movement would justify inclusion under the label of a Religious Messianic Movement or Millenarian Movement or Chiliastic movement as the movement would provide data for all the fourteen characteristics which Stephen Fuchs has identified"[141]But many crucial facts would militate against the mechanistic application of Fuchs to Ramalinga. In the same way, the application of Ranajit Guha's six invariant elements of the subaltern movement to Ramalinga's movement would be found to exclude many factors from the purview of research.[142]

To sum up, Ramalinga's life and mission have been unique in Tamil history. To say that he was a social reformer would sideline all his revolutionary interactions with religion and philosophy; on the other hand, to label him as a religious reformer would leave everything else devastated of content. His communication with the peasants was real

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[140]C.Paramarthalingam,Social Reform Movement in the Nineteenth century with Special Reference to St.Ramalinga, (Madurai:Rajakumari Publications, 1995), pp.34-68.
[141] Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965).
[142] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi:O.U.P.,1983).

and empirical. The study of his peasant based paradigm would become crucial. The application of a historiography oriented to the holistic approach could unravel Ramalinga's critique of contemporary life which in turn would facilitate the understanding of both the negation and affirmation as two sides of the same coin. Before that, it would become necessary to review Ramalinga's message and movement in the context of the then prevailing trend of modernisation so that the specifics of the deviant trend could be deciphered subsequently with precision.

CHAPTER II

THE UNIQUE MODERNISOR

Modernisation: The Two Dimensions

Modernisation characterised the chief dynamic of the socio-economic and cultural interactions and ethos which got attested in the Tamil society as it was the case with any other nationality in the nineteenth century British India. It broadly meant the praxis emerging from the transformation of a traditional society from its pre-modernity to modernity.[1] The change did not occur *suigeneris* but against the backdrop of the colonial engineering. The colonial interaction profile encompassed four major domains. The first was that of the coloniser country desiring to rule India in perpetuity and shape it in its own image.[2] The second was that of the Indian government which, on the one hand struggled to cope up with the imperial designs and, on the other strived to draw, as Anil Seal has pointed out, an element of consent from the ruled for the ruler.[3] The third was that of the Western educated and employed who were of the Macaulayan mould aspiring to reap the maximum benefit from their dependence.[4] The first involved the British

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[1] Irfan Habib, "Studying a Colonial Economy - Without Perceiving Colonialism", *Social Scientist*, No.139, Dec. 1984, p. 3.

[2] Grant Duff quoted by Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1968; rpt. Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.172.

[3] Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Colonial State and Agrarian Society", *Situating Indian History for Sarvepalli Gopal*, ed. Sabyasachi Chattacharya et al. (New Delhi: O.U.P., 1986) p.113. Also, Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians in India (Oxford, 1959); Robert Eric Frykenberg (& ed.), *Traditional Process of Power in South India: An Historical Analysis of Local Influence, Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (New Delhi, 1979).

[4] Sharp, H. and Richey, J.A., *Selections from Educational Records of the Government of India*, Vol.1:1859-1871 (New Delhi: National Archives of India), pp.107-117.

Imperial Project or Oriental Project;[5] the second caused the structural mediations, rule of law and occasional show of benevolence;[6] and the third projected the British rule as divine dispensation.[7] Qualitatively different from all the three but largely missing critical perception was the fourth domain. From this emerged a radical shift in the focus on modernity as distinct from contemporaneity prophesying the shaping of an alternate paradigm. St.Ramalinga's role as a unique modernisor would be studied in this chapter with reference to one of the two crucial dimensions or manifestations of modernisation – 'Renaissance' – or language modernisation.[8] The other dimension – the 'Reformation' or socio-cultural critique would be later dealt with.

The Needed Methodology

Language has been essentially social. Any social change has its own language and would essentially leave its imprints on that language. Through the language, people would communicate and participate in social action. The perception of a people would inextricably be linked with the sharpness of that language and the idioms with which it shaped those perceptions themselves. Great social changes would necessarily be associated with radical changes in the languages concerned. Oftentimes

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[5] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) deals with the topic from the angle of the subject forces.

[6] Famine Commission Report, 1880, para 3; S.C.Ray (ed.), *Agricultural Indebtedness in India and its Remedies: Selections from Official Documents* (Calcutta University, 1915), p.21.

[7] K.N.Panikkar, *The Intellectual History of Colonial India: Some Historiographical and Conceptual questions, Situating Indian History*, op.cit., p.405.

[8] Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "The Ambiguity of Progress: The Indian Society in Transition", *Social Scientist*, vol.13, No.3, Mar.1985, pp.3-14 deals with the problem of deciphering the signs and symbols.

the social conflicts have found expression in the language conflicts and the status of a language would be an indicator of the status of its speakers.[9] The language reforms have been sharper and qualitative when a society moved from tradition to modernity. When the said movement was conditioned and partial, so were the language reforms. Finally, the language reforms would be a measure of the strenuous efforts of its speakers to cope with the ongoing social change and make conscious interventions with a transformative praxis.[10] This dialectical perception of language reforms would enable one to overcome any sectarian approach fragmenting social change and language reforms. Given this methodology, the role of St.Ramalinga or any of his contemporaries would not remain isolated but represent modernisation of the language as a social process and praxis. The methodology would also necessitate a holistic perspective. This, in turn, would make essential the study of language reform exercises in the latter's dialectical polarity with the retarding and restrictive forces either as subservient to the dominant hegemony at the macro level or as counter hegemonic forces and help fix the respective role of the modernizers in the given historical context.

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[9] Lucian Goldman, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1975).
[10] Franz Boas, Race, *Language and Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 1940); Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

Ramalinga's Entry

St.Ramalinga [1823-1874] had his childhood and adulthood at Chennai and left for Chidambaram in 1858 when the country came directly under the crown. Chennai was fast developing into a modern city being the capital of the Presidency, though the pace of transition was at the tertiary level when compared to Calcutta and Bombay.[11] Urban development, in its wake, had caused the emergence of the neo urban classes who could exploit all the avenues that were open to them under the colonial dispensation. A striking contrast had come to the surface between the possessed and dispossessed as well as between the generations. Elite formation necessarily led to peripheralisation and lumpanisation. Money-power had unprecedentedly become the insignia of social status. The pleasure ethos of the privileged characterised pomp and luxury and were associated with explicit lust, vulgarity and vanity, while poverty precipitated the ethos of anarchy, violence and moral depravity.[12] As a child, Ramalinga was a victim to the horrors of urban life developing within himself many unconscious impulses as also a deviant psyche. This has been dealt with in the previous chapter.

Ramalinga's entry into modernity commenced with the *puranic* discourse making at elite houses. That this programme had acquired

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[11] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1968). Cambridge University Press,1971).p.32. th

[12] Uran Adigal (ed.), *Tiru Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai* (Hereinafter Tiru Arutpa -VI) (Chennai: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981), verses 1042, 1048, 3397, 3449, 3459, 3460-62.

wider prevalence as a new vocation as well as a sign of neo-urban cultural ethos during contemporary times was evidenced by Gopala Krishna Bharathi's practice of *Sangitha Vinigai* at Mayiladuthurai in Thanjavur District.[13] Paradoxically the *purana* got associated with modernity, for what really mattered was the show of man-power, landed power or governmental power, the new status and a gathering of the new allies of that power and not the actual content of the message. That the young boy Ramalinga himself was asked to hold the programme in the absence of his elder brother was one evidance in favour of the emptiness of meaning of the whole exercise.[14] According to Marai Thirunavukkarasu, son of Marai Malai Adgal, the neo-ritual had continued up to the close of the century, and even during the early decades of the twentieth century, with the expanded gathering of even the Christian priests and whence, invariably at the end, all agreed that Saivism was the most suited religion for modernity or contemporaneity.[15] The process also had precipitated its opposite. The discourse makers, both Ramalinga and G.K.Bharathi, had begun to reshape the *puranic* story against the backdrop of contemporary realities, re-interpret it with a popular perspective and for popular conscientisation and transform the

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[13] Swaminatha Iyer, U.V., *Gopala Krishna Bharathiyar* (1936; rpt. Madras: Kalamagal Kaariyaalayam, 1964), pp.31-32.
[14] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* (1971; 2nd ed. Vadalur: S.S.A.Nilayam, 1976), pp.22-25.
[15] Marai Tirunavukkarasu, *Maramalai Adigal Varalaaru* (Madras: Kazhagam, 1952), pp.13-15.

new exercise into a new literary form and a paradigm.[16] The transformation which the story of *Nandhan* underwent at the hands of G.K.Bharathi and of *Manu* at the hands of Ramalinga could later inspire C.Subramanya Bharathi (1882-1921) to write *Panchali Sabadham* as polemic against the colonial rule in *puranic* form. The study of the Tamil Renaissance must necessarily record the transformation as to how a popular discourse style had emerged ruing the nineteenth century marking the new dimension of the dominance of the prose form before the origin of the novel form.[17] Ramalinga was the pioneer in this regard.

The second aspect of Ramalinga's entry into the modernisation process was the choice to become a teacher. This too occurred in the historical context. The change to modernity essentially necessitated the imparting of modern education. For the colonial rulers, educating the Indians was a civilizing mission and for the missionaries it was a mission for conversion. Both ends met in 1813, for the Charter Act had lifted the ban on the entry of the Missionaries and facilitated the imparting of Western education. The Missionaries, on their arrival, generated the drive for the modern European type of education in India as against the traditional. Owing to the colonial design, a massive transition from tradition to modernity was not predicted and hence the two systems,

[16] Traditional prose in commentary form formed the thesis; Ziegenbalg's *Bible* translation in spoken Tamil, "Sangitha Vinigai' in spoken Tamil and the '*kirttanai'* works bearing popular dialogues formed the anti-thesis; and Ramalinga's *Manu Murai Kanda Vaasakam* formed the synthesis in the evolution of modern prose.

[17] The first novel in Tamil, *Prataba Mudaliyar Carittiram* of Veda Nayagam Pillai appeared in 1879 (rpt. Madras: Vaanavil Prasuram, 1979).

though different in qualitative terms, had to coexist throughout the century.[18] The Missionary efforts apart, the Company government, to start with, sponsored many schools and colleges and finally the University of Madras in 1857. The elite school concept had also come to stay.[19]

Comparatively, Western education was modern, secular and inclusive. School education was compartmentalised into progressive stages and every stage was clearly defined in terms of its scope and goal.[20] Besides literature and grammar, the students were offered the courses in History, Geography, Natural Science and Mathematics. The Missionaries trained the educated natives and absorbed them as teachers. Teaching thus turned out to be anybody's choice. The modernisation process initiated under colonialism necessitated the services of teachers in large numbers despite the fact of their education along Western or traditional lines. Those with self-education were also welcome. Those trained by the mutts could be absorbed in government institutions directly.[21]

Ramalinga's initial option was to teach the young children. In his adulthood he had to face such horrendous agonies that he soon became

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[18] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, *Pattonpadaam Nurraandil Tamizh Ilakkiyam* (1800-1900) (Tiruchi: Alagappa Puthaga Nilayam, 1962), pp.62-71.
[19] R.Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India 1852-1891*, (University of Arizona Press, 1974).
[20] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op cit., pp.69-71.
[21] U.V. Swaminatha Iyer could directly join the Department of Tamil, Government Arts College, Kumbakonam on a certificate from the Tiruvavaduthurai Mutt.

restless with the vocation and began to beat the children.[22] He had rightly chosen to leave them in peace by quitting the vocation. But the option was not closed. Higher education sphere was the alternative. He had acquired such a mastery of Tamil literature and grammar, Saivite literature and works on *tarka* (logic) that he could emerge as a co-competitor of the teachers of repute of his times and very soon he could ascend to the higher ranks of astounding merit.[23] Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar and Irukkam Rathina Mudaliyar had become Ramalinga's disciples in 1849. Ramalinga was the first modern teacher to have allowed the student evaluation of the teacher.[24] His entry happened during the formative phase of the development of modern Tamil language and his creative ascendance marked the transformative phase. Ramalinga had provided the link himself between the two phases.

The Formative Phase and Ramalinga's Affiliation

The first half of the nineteenth century formed the formative phase in Tamil renaissance. The immediate requirement was for the textbook in Tamil.[25] The Missionaries first, the British officials who were to learn the language next, the Text Book Society floated by them, their College of Fort St. George next, the Madras School Book Society of the Directorate of Public Instruction and finally the Madras Standing Committee for Text

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[22] *Tiru Arutpa VI*, op.cit., verses 3443, 3445, 3447, 3451-53, 3467, 3478, 3481-82, 3537.
[23] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., p.438.
[24] Ibid., pp.66-67, 69.
[25] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op. cit., pp.20-27.

Books – all paved the way for writing of the modern text books in prose. The financial assistance offered inspired the Western educated Tamils to internalise modern knowledge through the grammatical premises of the mother tongue and enrich the latter with original modern works. The text books, how much rudimentary they were, announced the arrival of the dawn of democratic learning. That prose had become the medium for teaching Tamil grammar was a significant starter for change for the better.

Language modernisation meant the "emancipation from the tyranny of the conventions of a dead past".[26] The traditional Tamil numerals system was found to cause much hardship for modernity to adopt. The school Book Society which had been floated by the Company officials had arranged for the release of re-structurisation text entitled *Ganitha Deepikai* in 1823.[27] The book had retained the traditional numerals one to nine, dispensed with the signs for ten, hundred and thousand and introduced the zero sign in their places. Also the signs +, -, x and ÷ were introduced. The change was not found to be adequate and finally the Missionaries had begun to teach the Arabic numerals which, in fact, amounted to a case of re-borrowing.[28]

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[26] William Miller's Introduction to V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar's *Tamizh Mozhiyin Varalaaru* (1903; rpt. Madras: Kabir Printing Works, 1953).
[27] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op cit., pp.51-61.
[28] The Arabs had leanrt the art from the Indians and from them the Europeans. Hence it was a re-borrowal. The Dravidian origin would stand.

The democratisation of reading effected by the printing press necessitated objectivity in deciphering as against the traditional subjective re-constructive reading followed for reading the palm leaf manuscripts.[29]The alphabets mattered much in print. The crucial influential thrust for re-structuring the alphabets arose from the need to teach the language to the British. The *munshies* [pandits] of the College of Fort St. George who were engaged in this had risen to the occasion to boldly effect the changes. They legalised the changes that had occurred earlier through C.J. Beschi [1680-1742] and those that had come to stay in popular writing through mysterious origin.[30] The stress on logical structures as against elite control was a significant premise for language modernisation.

The final requirement of the democratization of reading was the punctuation system. This occurred for the first time in Muthu Krishna Brahmam's commentary on *Nistaanubhuthi* published in 1851 bearing a list of punctuation marks adopted for the commentary.[31] That the teacher of repute 'Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai' wrote a dedicative verse for the work revealed his inseparable link with the then ongoing process of language modernisation. Ramalinga had offered his stamp of approval for the developments which had taken place during the

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[29] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op cit., pp.94, 107.
[30] Ibid., pp.343-350.
[31] Ibid., p.98.

formative phase, thereby himself joining the ranks of the contemporary modernisors.

Ramalinga turned out to be a modern publisher too. In 1851 he published the Vedantic work *Ozhivil Odukkum* (Ceaseless Detachment) with an elaborate commentary in prose for the preface of the work. In 1855 he had published *Tonda Mandal Cadagam* authentically explaining the etymology of the term *Tonda Mandalam* with inscriptional evidence.[32] For the first time, a text had been interpreted in the light of epigraphy and linguistics.

The Resultant Scenario

Privatisation and withdrawal of official sponsorship from 1868 pointed to a new era demanding new initiatives, creativity and commitment on the part of native intelligentsia. Evidently the formative phase or forming stage of the development of modern Tamil prose during the first half of the nineteenth century was the resultant of the interaction between two mutually attracting sectarian interests – the interests of the British to open a cultural dialogue with the natives and those of the latter to make themselves fit for the opportunities available

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[32] Like a specialist linguist, Ramalinga had derived the etymology of 'Tondai Mandalam' from the 'Tondai' plant:
*Kadambu > Kadamban
Vembu > Vemban
Aatondai > Aatondan
∴ plant name ending with vowel > vowel lost + - an added
*Aatondan Cakkaravartti > Aatonda Cakkaravartti Aatondan Mandalam > Aatonda Mandalam - an > Ø
*Naagai Pattinam > Naga Pattinam
Tondai Mandalam > Tonda Mandalam
-ai > -a

to them under the rule of the former. Both of them could coexist at that level. A transformation or leap necessitated a broader perspective of education in general, education through the mother tongue in particular, making education more inclusive and creative development of the language transcending mundane realities, gender discriminations and traditional and conventional constraints.

Nearly half a century of Western education had polarised the educated into various categories, some alarming and some frustrating. S.Veda Nayagam Pillai [1826-1889] observed that the commentaries in prose offered by some scholars to small works and the translations made by some for a few works in English were astonishing as to whether they were in Tamil or the non-decipherable writing of Lord Brahma himself or of some other language.[33] There were the teachers like who neither wrote the prose works themselves nor accepted the works done by the others.[34] Some started learning other languages like English or Hindi but ultimately turned unable to speak or write either in the mother tongue or the foreign or other language.[35] Some learnt the other languages but quit learning the mother tongue.[36] Some had the least ability to write two lines without mistake and their own names correctly in the mother

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[33] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi* (1869, 1870; rpt. Madras: Kazhagam, 1979), p.26.
[34] Ibid., p.28.
[35] Ibid., pp.25-26.
[36] Ibid.

tongue.[37] Western education was not received uniformly by all with uniform purpose and commitment. Later V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar [1870-1903] could observe that the social change in the use of the language must tally with the reforms which the said language had undergone and that in the case of contemporary Tamil language that did not occur.[38] To add to the misery, the Tamil language had become a no man's land where anything done by anybody went unquestioned and many had started writing things as they appeared to them at the instant and in a way best suited to their minds.[39] English vocabulary had infiltrated into the common language overriding the barriers of the native language, though the fact was positively viewed by Sastri in his anti-Sanskrit hegemony and Puritanist stance.[40] For Sastri the trend could not be resisted, for the common people had made it a privilege to mingle English words in their speech with the magical belief of having attained the *Sahibhood* (status of the rulers).[41] There had also arisen the 'English enough' psyche.

Another alarming development observed by the *Dravida Sastri* was the widening gulf between the elitist and popular language. The Tamil of the elites and that of the common folk quite varied and had begun to look like two different languages. If that trend continued unchecked, the

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[37] Ibid.
[38] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op cit., p.110.
[39] Ibid., p.111.
[40] Ibid., p.117.
[41] Ibid.

elite Tamil would cease and remains frozen on paper like Sanskrit while popular Tamil would deviate to form different languages like Telugu and Malayalam.[42] What was vital was the correspondence between the elite and popular language contributing to the standardisation of that language of the superior people and that of the ordinary as well as between the spoken and written.

The scenario that had come into existence during the second half of the nineteenth century formed the backdrop against which the transforming modernisors had to work. The most crucial factor to cause the backdrop was, however, the operational dynamics of the Imperial Project.

The Imperial Project

English education was imparted to the Indians by the colonial government of India from the early decades of the nineteenth century. The quoted reasons were a. to control disorders and improve the morals of Britain's 'Asiatic Subjects' (1797);[43] b. to form part of a cumulative package along with the decision to permit entry of the Missionaries and enact interventional legislations (1813);[44] c. to favourably act upon the habits and character of those Indians introduced into places of trust

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[42] Ibid., pp.111-112.

[43] Charles Grant, Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain Particularly with Reference to Morals and Means of Improving it, Report to the Court of Directors, 1797; Ainsle Thomas Embree, *Charles Grant and British Rule in India* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), pp.7-8.

[44] In their dispatch of 7-9-1808, the COD had refused the gospel work; Charles Grant's request was also turned down in 1793. The 1813 Charter Act conceded to the Missionaries and Free Traders abolishing Company's monopoly; H.Sharp, op cit., pp.3-4.

(1832);[45] d. to make the people more amenable (1833);[46] and to form a class of intermediaries both at the administrative and cultural levels (1835).[47] English education was supplemented by two other strategies.

Besides introducing English education and English literary studies (1853) to project their intellectual superiority,[48] Anglicising the Church and the Bible to establish religious superiority[49] and enacting interventional legislations to prove their cultural and moral superiority, the British also attempted to effect a cultural synthesis by 'discovering and revealing' to the natives that they also belonged to a superior culture like the British and that culture remained distinct from the Aryan. An 'essential Tamil culture' was resurrected, dusted off and presented to the Tamils as part of the programme of the 'discovery of India for the natives'.[50]

Simultaneous with the introduction of the modern education system, the British had effected 'settlements' breaking the traditional *kaaniyaatci* (or the proportional sharing of right to land) system and the

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[45] Report of the Select Committee, 1832:

> It is on all hands allowed that the general cultivation of the English language is most highly desirable both with a view to the introduction of the natives into places of trust, and as a powerful means of operating favourably on their habits and character.

Quoted in Kali Kinkar Datta, *A Social History of Modern India* (New Delhi: The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., 1975), Preface, p.VII.

[46] Macaulay's Speech Before the House of Commons, 1833 quoted in Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule* (1901; London: Kegan Paul, Treach, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1908), p.423.

[47] Macaulay's Minute of 2nd Feb., 1835 in H.Sharp, op cit., vol.1, pp.107-117.

[48] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "After Orientalism: Colonialism and English Literary Studies in India", *Social Scientist*, No.158, July 1986, pp.23-35.

[49] J.P.Jeyakumar, *Kirittava Tamizh Vedagamattin Samuga Panpaattu Taakkam: Or Aayvu* (Tamil) (Bharathidasan University, 1994), pp.65-90, 173-179.

[50] Edward Said, op cit.

bonds of interrelatedness prevailing among the peasants.[51] The various strata of the peasant population were cut off from their binding relations and were fragmented. The traditional land controllers, village officials and those who had been exercising supervisory power were only to gain from the decline of the *jajamans* (peasant *yajamaana*) system as they became the absolute tile holders of the lands and constituted the rural bureaucracy for the *circar* as the landlords collecting revenue, co-adjutors of the government officials and as honorary Magistrates. As Anil Seal has pointed out, they had turned to the new form of education not with an "enthusiasm for the cultural tidings about empiricism and induction" but with the "calculation of the material benefits that might accrue from learning the ways of the new rulers."[52] The initial Braminical enthusiasm to exploit the new situation, coupled with the reluctance of the landed non-Brahmins towards education to start with, had precipitated the Sanskrit superiority complex and undermining of Tamil syndrome.[53] Government patronage for Sanskrit had contributed to the sharpening of the contradiction.

Macaulay's 'Minute of 2 Feb. 1835' revealed the coloniser's version of refining the vernaculars. The 'Minute' was a package, for, on the one hand, it proposed the class of Indians who were only Indians in blood

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[51] Kathleen Gough, "Indian Peasant Uprisings", *Peasant Struggles in India*, ed. A.R.Desai (New Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1979), p.89.

[52] Anil Seal, op cit., p.11.

[53] Anil Seal, op cit., pp.1-130. and Suntharalingam op cit. also see.V.G.S.Surya Narayana Sastriar, Tamizh Mozhiyin Varalaaru(1903:rpt.Madras:Kabeer Printing works.1953).pp.29-38.

and colour but English in tastes, opinions and morals and intellect and their absorption as interpreters between the British and the millions they governed and, on the other, it proposed to convey knowledge to the great mass of the population by rendering the vernaculars, by 'degrees', fit vehicles endowed with the terms of science 'borrowed' from the Western nomenclature through the class so created. The 'Minute' obfuscated many things.

First, it intended to 'orient' native renaissance to suit the colonial needs. Secondly, it proposed to effect 'refinement' through the Western educated and employed with a view to restricting and monitoring the quantum and direction of change. Thirdly, by 'degrees' meant the decree against any possible leap. Fourthly, it proposed only the partial development of the productive forces through the references to the 'conveyance' of knowledge as against its generation and borrowal of some terms of science and technology as against the creation of a science and technological base indigenously. Evidently the package meant a proposal to establish the superiority of the master discourse and subject modernisation to colonial engineering. Hence, as K.N.Panikkar has pointed out, modernisation must mean and incorporate the cultural-intellectual processes generated by the cultural-intellectual struggles as against the colonial hegemony.[54]

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[54] K.N. Panikkar, op cit., pp.403-433.

The Four Modernisors

S.Veda Nayagam Pillai (1826-1889), Sundaram Pillai (1822-1897), V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar [1870-1903] and St.Ramalinga [1823-1874] were the chief modernizers of the second half of the nineteenth century.[55] But the reliance on the European definition of Renaissance and Reformation has contributed to the marginilisation of St.Ramalinga's role as a modernisor. Western education, formal or non-formal and, or, employment have become the basis of this classification and marginalization. It could not have occurred on the basis of the traditionalist-modernist dichotomy, for Ramalinga was not a traditionalist. Nor could it be on the basis of the dichotomy between religion and modernity, for Ramalinga was not religious but only spiritual. If spirituality, as against modernity, was the criterion, modernity would remain a blank. If association with the mutt or otherwise was the criterion, Veda Nayagam Pillai would cease to be a modernisor. If writing poetry went against one's classification as a modernisor, all would fail to qualify. The reason for Ramalinga's exclusion must be traced to his uniqueness. Four variables – a. Prose for Development; b. The participation Dynamic; c. East-West Synthesis; and d. Tamil Identity – would be used in this chapter to define the role of the nineteenth century Tamil modernizers and to identify St.Ramalinga's

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[55] S.Ramamurthy, *The Emergence of the Peasant Agrarian System in Tamilnadu and its Impact on the Nineteenth Century Tamil Renaissance and Modernisation Trends* (University of Madras, 1989), pp.259-334.

unique status among them. The purpose of this study would be to hold modernisation as the key to unfold many of the mysteries enshrouding Ramalinga's life in the historical context.

Prose for development

The development of prose works in a predominant manner and in terms of practical utility in any language has been a reliable indicator of the social change to modernity. In colonial Indian conditions, this predominance could not be witnessed, for those who wrote poetry had at times written prose while those who wrote prose had most often written poetry. Further, the disciples of the modern were not necessarily modern and vice versa. Common lineage linked them all under various *Guru-Sishya* (teacher-student) groupings. The traditionalist-modernist dichotomy could not explain the nature and extent of the language reforms at work.

Some of the early modernisors as well as the British blamed the Tamil tradition for the lack of prose works while the mature modernists of the later half of the century, like Veda Nayagam Pillai, offered an apologia for the ancients who lacked the facilities for developing prose.[56] Both the blame as well as its apologia was unjust and anachronistic, for the traditional lack of prose works did not arise due to excessive fascination for poetry or mainly because of the lack of modern instruments of writing or printing. One could not miss the fact that

[56] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op.cit, pp.124-131.

elaborate commentaries in prose had been written during the pre-modern periods using the palm leaf and needle.

Modern prose must differentiate itself from the traditional not merely in terms of quantity but quality too. Modern prose, and on that count poetry too, must necessarily be accompanied in terms of access to education, socio-cultural participation, consumption and contribution to the social product and sharing of development. It was not due to an instant fascination that prose developed during the nineteenth century but as a corollary of changes in human interactions and interrelations, behavioural patterns, aesthetics and value system concretized by the emergence of the modern capitalist economy, though in its colonially modified form, from the pre-modern. That the change to modernity in terms of the development of prose was not to the required level, that the first novel itself was conceived as the *kavya* [epic] in *vacana* (prose) and that the crusade against the traditional value system was at its minimum – were all due to the fact that, as Karl Marx had observed, the traditional society was being broken without an alternative, that the emergent bourgeois society could not release the productive forces to the required level, that there were class compromises with the traditional sources of power and that the rising hegemony of the new class forces also predicted, what Antonio Gramsci called it, the 'passive revolution' path.[57]

[57] Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (ed.trans.) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London, 1971), Antonio Gramsci: *Selection from political Writings: 1921-1926* (London, 1978)

The degree and nature of transition to an exclusive reliance on prose would, therefore, require the development of the new productive forces as against those of the traditional. How far the modernisors raised the status of Tamil prose with a view to facilitating the release of the productive forces would testify to the degree of modernity. That depended on the degree of awareness of the productive role of prose in development.

Tandava Raya Mudaliyar's text book on grammar entitled *Ilakkana Vinaa Vidai* (1820) in prose published by the College of Fort St.George has marked the beginning of a new era.[58] Prose was considered no more ornamental or a second fiddle to poetry but an essential tool for communication. Traditionally the grammatical works were only in poetry and that too in the precise and prescriptive *Suthra* (condensed verse) form. The commentaries alone were in prose encapsulating the text and exhibiting an accommodative skill of the commentators to give a overriding status to the text transcending the socio-temporal context. Studying grammar was an elitist privilege and its chief purpose was to engineer the control dynamic. The use of prose did not produce an inclusive paradigm in the pre-modern context. Mass education, mass reading and mass aesthetics alone could replace the elite based control dynamic of grammar by mass communication and consumption requirements. The grammatical work exclusively in prose and that too in

[58] Mylai Seeni Venkataswami, op.cit., pp.20-27, 131.

the question answer (or dialogue) form, therefore, heralded a new era of democratisation of the language control dynamic itself. Prose in its hegemony under modernity would democratise not only reading but creativity and 'power'. Prose for contemporary development was visualized by Visaga Perumal, the 'Chief Munshi' of the Company University in 1852 when he stressed the need to negate poetry and make the children learn the works on grammar and literature, mathematics, geography and Astronomy through prose so that they would "learn many works, understand many things and become capable of executing many jobs."[59] For him a modern work could demand its justification on three countrs; a.it should get organized with clarity in prose; b.it should be composed of words in common usage; and c.it should be made utilisable in schools (or must have text book status). Visaga Perumal had published *Baala Botha Ilakkanam* (1852), a work of grammar in prose for children, and *Kalvi Payan*, a work on the utility value of education.[60] Winslow in 1862 called upon the "accurate scholars"[61] to mould the prose properly from out of its forming state.

Veda Nayagam Pillai was against the undue predominance of poetry in contemporary life situations. When he stated that the "works of this country in poetical form are useless for the many"[62] his stress was

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[59] Ibid., p.126 quotation.
[60] Ibid., pp.296-297
[61] Quoted in Ibid, pp.124-125, Winslo*w's Tamil-English Dictionary, 1862*
[62] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalv*i, op.cit., p.26

on a polemic of popular consumption or broad based consumption and elevation against a medium which was by its very nature elitist and exclusive. It was an advocacy for the democratization of reading, knowledge and aesthetics. By referring to the use value, he had conceived prose in its essential role in reforming the country since there was "practically no purpose"[63] in holding the view that poetry would deliver the elements of reform. For him the language in the given historical context should serve the 'many' as against a few and be 'useful' by reforming itself for the purpose.

V.G.S.Sastri was the ideologue of change and development. He wrote *Tamil Mozhi Varalaaru* (1898) with a view to accommodating the structural dynamics of the language within the framework of modern linguistics and made certain corrective interpretations of traditional grammar with a fervent plea for their acceptance with a holistic perspective.[64] For him, any language was in constant motion. Motion must inevitably result in change. Hence whenever world civilisation changed and produced new ideas, whenever mental horizon broadened, whenever new factors were invented, whenever new aesthetic concepts emerged, whenever new things invaded from abroad, the language should struggle to survive, change grow and mature and reform itself

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[63] Ibid., p.28.
[64] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op.cit., p.VIII.

evolving in the process new words and syntax and signs and symbols.[65] Sastri had clearly linked the change and development in a language with the overall socio-economic and political, and consequent cultural, changes in the given historical context and the inevitability of change against survival. The change must be broad based encompassing the spheres of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and stylistics.

Sundaram Pillai has made a polemic against those modernisors who, under the pretext of fighting vulgarity, themselves vulgarized a glorious past and attempted to make the Tamils severe their links with the past heritage.[66] Poetry served the needs of the times that produced it. One had to comprehend the contemporary needs and create the needed works oneself. He wrote *Manonmaniyam* a drama in modern verse (1891) adopting the Shakespearean format.[67] By this he could show his contemporaries how modern knowledge could be conveyed through literature irrespective of its medium. The "respective positions would suit the respective individuals"[68] but all must "work in a way possible."[69] *Abhimana* or commitment to the language or nation was not a legacy but a right and passivity to assert amounted to the chillness of the dead.[70] According to S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, Sundaram Pillai was one of the 'sparkling

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[65] Ibid., p.110.
[66] See S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, Tamizh Cudar Manigal (1949: rpt. Madras: Paari Nilayam, 1968); A.Seenivasa Raghavan, Oru Nurraandu Tamizh Kavidhai (Coimbatore: Mercury Book Company, 1970)
[67] The drama was not meant for the stage
[68] This was a resolution in a philosophical dispute concerning social interventions.
[69] Ibid.
[70] The war message in the drama.

Tamil diamonds' of contemporary times and had prescribed two duties for the Tamils: a. collecting and preserving the works of the forefathers; and b. creating one's own.[71]

Ramalinga, in terms of his approach to modernity, differed significantly from both the 'poetry alone' traditionalists and 'both poetry and prose' modernists, for, according to him, what counted critically in prose or poetry was the mode of perception of contemporary or the objective external milieu and not mere adherence to the form. Development must inevitably by linked with perception and not conceived as a new rhetoric or dogma in prose or rhime. The publication of *Ozhivil Odukkam* (1851) revealed his purpose which was *aanma botha* or spiritual comprehension as against *tan botha* or materiality reflex.[72] When *cittam* or consciousness was dead to the emotions caused by *manam* or mind and *buddhi* or intellect and processed the sensations as per the wisdom of *aanma* or soul, what resulted was the ultimate *savigarpa kaatci* or the total vision of parts and the whole.[73] Ramalinga's reputation itself had worked against him as the 'making *cittam* dead to emotions' concept was averse to those who were the privileged under the

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[71] S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, op.cit., p.248.

[72] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit., pp.83-99

[73] The process of comprehension of the external milieu involved the four spheres of the 'manam' or mind, buddhi, or intellect, cittam or ullam or consciousness and action potential or ahankaara of the soul as per the tarka grammar. Sense perception would be vague at the first phase; tentative decision making would occur at the second phase; buddhi would convey the decision to cittam along with the emotions carried through consciousness would suffer the emotions of materiality and promote actions leading to a vicious circle.

colonial dispensation.[74] They saw to it that the subsequent three editions of the work did not contain Ramalinga's name and commentary until 1906.[75]

Having had a set back in advancing the concept of *tan botha* renumciation, Ramalinga had switched over to the attack on the outward manifestations of *tan botha* which found its fullest version in *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam* [1854].[76] The difference in construction between the traditional story of Manu and Ramalinga's version was the Ministers' consolation of Manu regarding the killing of the calf under the wheels of the royal chariot and manu's retort. Ramalinga's chief purpose seemed to be the exposure of the outward manifestation of *tan botha* resulting in the stooge mentality of justifying everything relating to the powers that be for the material benefits arising therefrom.

The work was in vibrant prose with a popular grammatical style bearing an emotive syntax and incorporating the vocabulary from the popular language and folk symbols and adages. Constantine Joseph Beschi's prose works of the eighteenth century were in elite high caste pomp language.[77] He had unleashed a merciless slander against Bartholomaeu Ziegenbalg's publication of the Tamil version of the 'New Testament' from Tranquebar which was in the spoken language of the

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[74] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit., p.75
[75] Ibid.,
[76] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi* (1972: Madras: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981) pp.3-50
[77] He belonged to the 'Madura Mission' which after Xavier's experiences, had adopted the path of imitation of Braminism.

people there enriched with the vocabulary from the fishermen dialect.[78] The language was branded as vulgar by Beschi in all chosen abusive and contemptuous words. The problematic had revealed the thematic of contempt for the ordinary people and their culture. Prose was branded as *Urai Vaacagam* or *vacana.* The term was a satire against its relevance. Ramalinga's *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam* had transformed the satire into a grandeur. Ramalinga had turned from being a commentary writer into a modern creative prose writer. The blossoming of modern prose was not a mere linguistic exercise, for it had carried with it the polemic against the crushing of the innocent calves by the wheels of the royal chariot.

The evolution did not stop at that. The letters of Ramalinga written during 1858 and 1870 marked another significant stage of his prose-writing.[79] The elitist style had disappeared to such an extent that Ramalinga was even tested as to whether he was well versed in Tamil grammar at all and the test ultimately revealed the fact that he was not a mere intellectual but a 'great man of wisdom' (*parama gnaani*). It was a new wisdom arising from mass interactions and identity and found expression in vibrant prose that carried the beats of his heart and longings of the soul in transparent form. The references to the distress of the debt burdened people, the harassment of the innocents, the

[78] The Roman Catholic Church was on its decline and Beschi had turned his frustration into wrath against Tranquebar Lutherans and their low caste converts.
[79] *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., pp.32-34.

problems of the helpless, the vanity of the ignorant, the helplessness caused by the money power system and the horrors of famines had given an entirely new direction for the development of contemporary prose. The climax constituted the *vinnappams* or prayers, the *upadesas* or sermons and finally *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam,* the crusade against hunger and the 'Manifesto' of the *Sanmarga* movement.[80] Modern Tamil prose showed a leap in its development by portraying the relative underdevelopment and impoverishment of the vast masses of the people who could not see the light of modernity at all.

The Participation Dynamic

The change to modernity necessarily predicted the greater unleashing of productive forces. It was unprecedented in the case of the industrial revolution of Europe wherein the transition was near total and ensured the participation of the majority of the people in the changed mode of production. The consumption pattern had undergone qualitative changes. Mass literacy demanded democratized creativity in terms of form and content. Renaissance caused the rejuvenation of the languages of the participants. Change to modernity inevitably precipitated mass participation at the cultural level including the Sharing or acquiring of knowledge through the language. Laymen had turned into priests and

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[80] Ibid.

their versions had attained the status of 'interpretations.'[81] The situation in the colonies was altogether different. Here the transition was only partial as it was subjected to the dictates of the dominant dynamic. The feudal classes not only remained but turned allies too. No outright crusade against the feudal ethos was demanded but a co existence with the emerging bourgeois ethos. Mass participation also depended on the degree to which the various castes and communities could emerge as co-competitors. The Renaissance largely remained middle class oriented in the colonial context.[82] How far the modernisors of the second half of the nineteenth century Tamil society who interacted with this situation primarily depended on their educated middle class origin and employment under the colonial dispensation being mediated by the un even development of regions of living, personal dependence and friendship and the subordinating influence of the commercial and administrative elite and their nexus with the rural hegemonic forces have been elaborately discussed by R.Suntharalingam.[83] Participation dynamic would, in this context, mean the prioritised involvement of the people in the language modernisation process or an option exercised in that direction. Besides the individual orientations of the modernisors, the crucial operative factor to reckon with was the cultural ethos or nullity

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[81] Marx had made a similar tribute to Martin Luther; "Contribution to the Critique of hegal's Philosophy of Law: Introduction" [1844] in *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers,1976). P.46.; J.P.Jeyakumar, op.cit.,

[82] Anil Seal, op.cit., Suntharalingam, op.cit.

[83] Suntharalingam, op.cit.

precipitated by the ruling discourse for its hegemony. Herein lay the exposure of the contradiction between the colonial hegemony and the modernisors themselves.[84] The perception of the modernisor basically decided the extent or 'reach' of his own participation dynamic.

Veda Nayagam Pillai was a *vellala* by birth and a catholic by conversion. He had western education through the non-formal channel. He had become a *Munshiff* in the judicial dispensation of the colonial regime. He was a close friend of the Tiruvavaduthurai Mutt and its chief *Pandit* Mahavidwan Meenakshi Sundarm Pillai.[85] While western education and employment had made him a modernisor, the association with the Mutt and the Maha Vidhwan must have inspired him towards poetry. The *Vellala* origin, association with the Mutt and employment must have contributed to his affirmative attitude towards the colonial dispensation. His mass participation dynamic or language modernisation envelop was shaped by the adoption of the landed class perspectives. The observed irregularities in administration could not make him to come out of the vicious circle. He took shelter in his 'faith' and viewed grief as a sin.[86] Gopala Krishna Bharathi's friendship and the horrors of the recurrent famines especially that of the Tamil *Taatu* year [1877] coupled with the agony of quitting the profession in protest against vindictive

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[84] But the modernisors had cemented the cracks with ethical, moral, religious and philosophical values.
[85] The Mahavidhwan wrote a literary work, *Kulattur Kovai* in honor of Veda Nayagam Pillai.
[86] We are not jealous, Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi*, op.cit., pp.25-26.

transfer had ultimately transformed him into a secular humanist.[87] Veda Nayagam Pillai developed then a broader canvas to approach a broader section of the people with his multi religious and secular ethos. He wrote the first novel in Tamil.[88] But the affiliation to the canonical orthodoxy, attitude towards the colonial rule and ideological orientation based on the landed class perspectives had remained the same.

For Veda Nayagam Pillai, the languages were competent to deliver the elements of reform across the country, for it provided the essential unity. The British rule effected the reforms and it was for the language to transmit them to the people concerned.[89] Practically poetry was not of much use in this but prose which could make the reform intelligible.[90] Prose could thus make the people appreciate the reforms and give their consent for the good government with good laws without developing a jaundiced eye towards it.[91] It would be better for one to refrain from both speaking and writing if one could not make one's idea intelligible to others.[92] It was a pragmatic view. Prose could be read and heard as well as be understood by all, provided intelligibility was the criterion. Prose should thus reach the people and serve their purpose by drawing them into the change over to modernity and making them share the ideas. 'Intelligible' prose was thus meant to facilitate grouping for the

[87] A.Seenivasa Raghavan, op.cit.
[88] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Prataba Mudaliyar Carittiram*, op.cit.
[89] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi*, op.cit., p.9.
[90] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Prataba Mudaliar Carittiram*, op.cit., pp.127-128.
[91] S,.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Nidhi Nul*, (1859: rpt. Madras: kazhagam, 1978), verse 22:4.
[92] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi*, op.cit., p.28.

betterment and striking a common rhythm. Veda Nayagam Pillai evidently championed the cause of the ruling discourse in contemporary Tamil society and strived to achieve that 'reach' as envisaged by the colonial design of modernisation of the Tamil language.

V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar who later changed his name, or Tamilised his Braminical name, as *Paridi Maal Kalaignar* was an astute modernisor of the Tamil language. The non-landed middle class Braminical discendance, formal western education, Chennai life and employment as Professor in the elite Madras Christian College were the crucial mediations. He lived during the last few decades of the century and, in that context, his views on the modernisation of the Tamil language had attained a historical and socio-political connotation.

Developing the theme of intelligibility further Sastri made it clear that nobody wrote anything for personal consumption but with the hope that it should be understood by the others.[93] Writing was thus a social act and it had to be in clear style enabling all others to read and understand. Veda Nayagam Pillai had stopped at this, but, being a philologist, Sastri proceeded further to stress intelligibility for the standardization of the language. Popular 'reach' was a must for the correspondence originating from that alone would contribute to standardisation striking a balance between the language of the superior

[93] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op.cit., p.112.

people and that of the ordinary as well as between the spoken and written languages.[94]

To reduce the gap between the elite and popular languages, the writers had to change their style which bewildered the people and sidelined them. The ordinary people never bothered to pursue anything further which blurred the meaning at the first instance.[95] The change in style must be characterized by the avoidance of the metamorphosed words, archaic vocabulary, obsolete usages, prosodial features, inexplicit case constructions and unnecessary coupling of words.[96] If only the intellectuals chose to reform the ordinary people, make them move with harmony and help with the writings enriched by clarity and intelligibility, the gap would disappear.[97] They were not to lose anything when they were being supported by the ordinary people.[98] Ensuring mass participation was thus identified as the crucial path to language modernisation.[99] Sastri was thus sharing the concern of Veda Nayagam Pillai but had raised an alarm against the observed monopolisation and unleashed elitism causing disharmony and cutting the roots of the reform itself. Sastri's purpose was to indegenise language modernisation without the constraints from, but within the scope of, the official discourse.

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[94] Ibid., pp.111-112.
[95] Ibid., p.114.
[96] Ibid., p.112
[97] Ibid., p.114.
[98] Ibid.,.
[99] He was metaphysical and could not relate life and language.

Sundarm Pillai had to live in the *Samasthana* (kingly territory) of Tiruvananthapuram and was almost a non-participant observer of the happenings in the Tamil speaking areas of the Madras Presidency. As regards the participation dynamic, he had fallen in line with Veda Nayagam Pillai and Sastri.

Ramalinga was unique. The other modernisors had tried to enfold the people into the modernisation process by transforming themselves flexible and making their writings intelligible. They and the rulers were the ultimate beneficiaries of the harmony which was zealously aimed at. The proposed language 'reach' actually helped channelise their own energies and make group praxis. The people at large were only to be treated as objects. Ramalinga had earlier shown the signs of deviation from their path when he wrote *Manu Murai Kanda Vaacagam*, but then he had to oscillate until 1858 when he finally negated the path of elitist intellectualism and chose to live among the small peasants at Vadalur. What occurred was the reverse of what was envisaged by the official version of the elites. Ramalinga had already reached the people before the attempted modernist 'reach' actually enfolded them. He had come out of the vicious circle of official modernity and begun to re-shape the ideals of language renaissance.

Ramalinga had replaced intelligibility by conscientisation. That this was his new perception on the 'reach' of language was evident from the

muda munda vidhwan episode.[100] Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar was teaching *Tirukkural* to the rural folk at *Saalai* with all his intellectual prowess and interpretative skill which did not reach them but had only bewildered them. Ramalinga used the occasion to enlighten his associates that one should not be *muda munda Vidhwan* (a foolish teacher) but *mudam unda Vidhwan* (a teacher with clear insight). Ramalinga's views on language and education and human emancipation got merged into a philosophical tenet at *Siddhi Valaagam*. Language should not be made a tool to while away the time but channelise education towards the goal of deathlessness [*caagaadha kalvi*][101] Language must lead to the establishment "a bigger life of uninterrupted total natural joyfulness"[102] on earth. The functioning of a language should not cause any obfuscating effect on reality but only intelligibility to the people. It must generate the pity in the soul or *aanma urukkam* for removing the obstacle [*tadai nivartti*] which was conceptualized as *Jiva Kaarunya*.[103] The bigger life depended on *ika loga Ozhukkam*[104] or life in this world and it was the anti-thesis of the life which had actually been precipitated under the modernisation-dispensation regime engineered by the colonial hegemony.

[100] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, Op.Cit., pp.459-460.
[101] *Tiru Arutpa, VI*. op.cit., vers*es 3678*, 4615:1567, 5061, 5517.
[102] Tiru Arutpa, *U*rainadai Pagudi, op.cit., pp.51,451-452.
[103] Ibid., *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam*, p.57.
[104] Ibid., p.56.

Ramalinga had evolved the discourse pattern of deliverance.[105] The simplicity and elegance with which he had prepared the lecture notes, written the letters and made the sermons and prayers (*upadesas and vinnappams*) and the notifications and constructed the 'manifesto' of the *Sanmarga* movement, *Jiva kaarunya Ozhukkam,* were self-revelatory as to their people oriented design. Like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, Ramalinga was aware of the role of ideology in conscientisation and had evolved the *Sanmarga* philosophy.[106] Long before Mao Tse Tung, Ramalinga had delivered his own *Yenan Forum* (*Siddhi Valaagam*) lectures.[107] For him conscientisation involved both theory and practice, the *Sanmarga* philosophy and movement. In this too, he had pioneered the field as against Mao who later on advocated the two fronts strategy- that of the pen and of the gun [the last symbolising the material struggles and the movement and the former the ideology].

The East-West Synthesis

The East-West Synthesis formed an essential component of the language modernisation programme of the modernisors except Ramalinga.

The image of the British loomed large as an essential embodiment of all knowledge. The progressiveness of the West abstracted and divorced from the historical forces which went into their making,

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105 He had the audience in mind even while writing.
106 This was his whole message expressed in various forms of prose and poetry.
107 Mao's Lecture on art and literature; see Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung, Peking, 1964.

appeared as ideologies.[108] The colonial rule which facilitated the imparting of these ideologies appeared as divine dispensation capable of being instrumental in bringing about progressive changes in India. Veda Nayagam Pillai observed that "not because of physical strength but because of educational strength that a few British could rule over the crores and crores of the people of this Hindu country like a well swallowing the sea."[109] For him, there were very many good things expressed in the works written in English and French and it was the duty of the native scholars to comprehend and translate them into the native tongue as to make them useful for the men and women of this country.[110]

For Sundaram Pillai, the works in English revealed the great intellectual traditions of modern Europe.[111] Any new work being written in Tamil must necessarily adopt that tradition. He advocated the view that an effective synthesis could be worked out in the use of borrowed words. "His love for Tamil thus made great strides which were very much needed by the times."[112]

Sastri endorsed the view of Veda Nayagam Pillai that the strength of the British was the educational strength and added that this strength,

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108 For Edward Said, it was the "complex problem of Knowledge and Power" op.cit., p.24; K.N.Panikkar has held that the idealisation "negated the possible genesis of an independent body of thought to cope with the problems faced by Indian society," op.cit., p.409

109 S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi*, op.cit., p.23.

110 Ibid., p.26.

111 S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, op.cit., p.248.

112 A.Seenivasa Raghavan, op.cit., p.67.

arising from their ability to internalise the newer aspects found anywhere in the world, had given them worldly wisdom, the capacity to comprehend the life situations, the power to win the countries and maintain an image which was held superiors over the rest.[113] Hence he had concluded that if the Tamils were to rise in civilisation like the British, they should understand the secrets of their *sasthras* (works) by learning English.[114] For Sastri the learning from the British did not require mere imitation but a case study as was the case with Sundarm Pillai too. The knowledge acquired through the learning of English must be transferred into the native language even by way of translations.[115] There was nothing wrong in directly borrowing English vocabulary as English had become an Indian dialect, that innumerable words from English had made a silent entry into the spoken Tamil language, that the trend could not be resisted with the British in power and that the common people had made it a privilege to mingle English words in their speech.[116]

Ramalinga was not opposed to English or, for that matter, any other language but the dominance and subordination associated with that alien language. He had arranged to teach English and Sanskrit,

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[113] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op.cit., pp.117-118.
[114] Ibid., p.118.
[115] Ibid.,.
[116] Ibid., p.117.

besides Tamil, in the school sponsored by the *Saalai*[117] He was even convinced that the employment under the British was preferable as against that under the natives who only remained with disunity [*orumai illadha indukkal*].[118] He could assimilate elements from the ruler's religion for which he was slandered by Ochs as a 'Swindler'.[119]

Ramalinga differed from the contemporary modernisors in the context of the East-West synthesis on four counts: first, he had come out of the vicious circle that had engulfed the other modernisors; secondly his conscientisation programme had transcended the East-West dichotomy and centred on those who "neither knew the East nor the West"[120] as they remained submerged in reality; thirdly, he was for the creation of a dynamic contemporary culture as against that of a 'no blemishless past'[121] and a tyrannical present; and finally he was unique in making an outright crusade against the moribund systems and values without surrendering to the canonical authority.[122]

The Tamil Identity

The nineteenth century Tamil Renaissance encompassed within itself an identity crisis and its varied response at the level of the modernisors. Two major causations were discernible – a. the competitive

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[117] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., pp.368-481.
[118] Tiru Arutpa: *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., p.374.
[119] Eugene.F.Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s* (Cre-A; Madras: 1986), p.87.
[120] *Tiru ArutpaVI*, op.cit, verse 4329.
[121] For him even in *Tolkaapiyam* certain explanations were only round about; *Urainadai Pagudi*, op.cit., pp.354-355.
[122] The attack on the Vedas, Agamas, Puranas, Sasthras, Kulas, Varunas, Gothras, Suthras, manthras, itihasas, etc. by Ramalinga was outright and total.

imbalance at the community interaction level; and b.the impact of Braminical dominance. The non-Brahmin landed classes, to start with, were reluctant to compete for western education and employment as they were content with the power conferred on them by the British in terms of the settlements and by making them their allies.[123] The landed classes were especially reluctant in the education of their female wards for fear of resultant domestic insubordination and probable conversion. The Brahmins who had the privilege of education and government occupation in the previous regimes could zealously grab the opportunities available to them under the new dispensation. The Tamil Bramins stood second to the Maratha Bramins in the race for status and governmental power.[124] From the seventies of the century, the non-Bramins with landed power, the *Vellalas,* had become aware of the new or additional source of power and entered into the portals of secondary and higher education which till then remained as the exclusive preserve of the Bramins.[125] The alarmed Bramins began to stake their claim to superiority through Sanskrit. The Sanskrit superiority complex worked through the 'undermine and subordinate Tamil' attitude. The complex, coupled with the government patronage, precipitated its dialectical opposite, the Tamil identity. The non-landed classes and non-upper castes had nothing to do with both.

[123] Anil Seal, op.cit, pp.98-99.
[124] Ibid.,
[125] Ibid.

The precipitation of Sanskrit-Tamil dichotomy of the nineteenth century marked the fifth significant stage in the Bramin- non-Bramin interaction in Tamil society:

a. The Braminical spread in Tamil Nadu during the Mauryan period (second wave) had brought in the religiously and politically insecure Bramins who, in order to establish their hold over the Tamil Kings, had become closer to them, Sanskritised them through the rituals, broken their centuries old unity, made them fight with each other to become the exclusive sovereign and caused the closure of the early historical period. The opposition of the Tamil poets could be traced from the tonal variations in the Sangam classics;[126]

b. The *Kali Age* or the 'Kalabhra Interregnum' marked the marginalisation of the Bramins under the supervisory control of the pastoral non-Bramins who owed allegience to Buddhism and Jainism;[127]

c. During the Pallava-Pandiya regime, the political *Pandits* of the Gupta regime caused the third wave interaction. They could ensure the ruling alliance of the kings, *Bramins* and *vellalas* and order the society with the Braminical 'bakthi' paradigm. For the first time the *vellala* or *kilaar* land controllers could attain the *Sat Sudra* status in the emerging caste structure through concession to Braminical supremacy and, in

[126] S.Rajeswaran, *Kalappirar Kaala Tamizhagam: or Aayvu* (Bharathidasan University ,1994).
[127] Ibid.

turn, ensuring the subordination of the rest of the peasantry to the *Bramin-Vellala* dominated village structure;[128]

d. The emergence of the *vellalas* as the *Cittira Meli Periya Naattaar* or supra-locality land controllers with the plough emblem at the close of the later Chola rule and their ability to assert power after the decline of Chola authority and subordinate commerce and urban development as well as Braminical supremacy marked a crucial development in Brahmin-non-Brahmin interaction. The Tamil Brahmins subordinated themselves to the primacy of the non-Bramin Vellala ascendancy. The fourteen Siddhanthic Sasthras provided the ritual sanction and ideological backdrop. Even with the concession given to the Brahmins during the Vijaya Nagaera era, the ascendancy did not recede. The 'Mathas' (Mutts) institutionalised the ascendancy;[129] and

e. The British rule had paved the way for the Bramins to make a fresh claim for their re-emergence through education and employment while at the same time it had allied with the non-Brahmin landed classes economically and politically. Two lines were open—to keep it as a non-antagonistic contradiction and strive for the betterment of the landed non-Bramin class or to involve broader masses of the non-Brahmin class to wage or stage a polemical battle to resolve the contradiction on a

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[128] Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (1980:New Delhi: O.U.P. 1985).

[129] See V.Jeyaraj, *Sivagnana Siddhiyar Alavai Ilakkanamum Aaraaycci Neri Muraigalum* (Bharathidasan University, 2006).

permanent basis. Ramalinga and the modernisors differed on this count.[130] The Tamil identity itself differed in this context.

Veda Nayagam Pillai's plea for education in general and women's education in particular was made to the elite landed classes who were the high caste non-brahmins. This close derivation would inevitably emerge when one studied the writing as a dialogue with the contemporaries. Pillai had used the appeasing tone when he told them that nothing would go wrong with education, that the authority of the male as advocated by the scriptures would remain in tact as a cultural barrier and that the quality of domestic life and joint family system would only get enhanced.[131] The Tamil language was used with the high caste identity. As against Braminism, he was only satirical. The first novel was the manifestation of the views of a typical middle class high caste modernisor projecting the interests of the landed non-Bramin classes with a view to enabling them to brave the tides of Renaissance.

V.G.S.Sastriar was the most explicit and vociferous spokesman against Sanskrit hegemony and his Tamil identity was clearly polemical eventhough he had shared the same modernisation platform with Veda Nayagam Pillai. For him Sanskrit had already caused much damage to Tamil in the past through the advocacy of the *mani pravaala* style of freely mingling the Sanskrit and Prakrit words in Tamil syntax without

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[130] N.Susila Salomi, *Kirittava Simaya Paravalum Ramalingarin Sanmarga Iyakkamum* (Bharathidasan University, 2008).
[131] S.Veda Nayagam Pillai, *Pen Kalvi*, op.cit.

the grammatical sanction.[132] The Sanskritists had advanced in their polemic, to the extent of questioning the very status of Tamil as a language.[133] Some earlier commentators like Cenavaraiyar and Parimelazhagar had boldly interpreted certain Tamil grammatical and semantic categories from their vantage point of reliance on Sanskrit primacy.[134] For Sundaram Pillai, Tamil and Sanskrit were the two eyes of the Goddess of education, but Sanskrit had lost its status as a living language while Tamil was blooming with youthfulness.[135]

According to Sastri, Kannada and Telugu had acquired deviant identities owing to the heavy influx of Sanskrit vocabulary and even grammatical categories.[136] He turned a puruitan and could not tolerate Tamil being Sanskritised to lose identity. Sanskrit was identified as the proliferating factor. Sundaram Pillai was also opposed to the Sanskritisation of Tamil and he was convinced that *Kodu Malayalam* (the crude Malayalam) had resulted from Sanskrit influx. But he was for adopting vocabulary from all languages including Sanskrit while Sastri vehemently opposed Sanskrit and recommended the English influx.[137]

With the awareness of the damages caused by Sanskrit hegemony, Sastri had evolved the 'English as the shield against Braminical dominance theory which has survived till date in Dravidian ideology as

[132] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op.cit.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., pp.29-38.
[135] P.Sundaram Pillai, *Manonmaniyam*, the invocatory verses in praise of the goddess Tamil.
[136] V.G.Surya Narayana Sastriar, op.cit., pp.27-28, 122.
[137] Ibid., pp.117-119.

the motivating factor in defense of the continuance of English as the link language. For Sastri English had a better claim in this regard, as against Sanskrit, for it had become a peripheral dialect gaining popular acceptance and day-to-day adoption and assimilation. English had become the saviour language in Tamil identity.

While Sastri and Sundaram Pillai had internalized Caldwell and Ellis in upholding the theory of the Northern and Southern languages, they were of the view that Tamil was the 'mother language' of the South and was unique.[138] For Sundaram Pillai, Tamil was the 'original goddess' who gave birth to all the Dravidian languages, herself remaining as she was.[139] Sastri proposed the theory that Tamil deserved the according of the status of a classical language (*cemmozhi*).[140] Paradoxically the critics who have dealt with Caldwell's legacy have failed to perceive the metamorphosis which Caldwell's theory underwent resulting in the conceptions of Tamil as the mother of the Dravidian languages, the Indo-European family language English as a peripheral Tamil dialect and Sanskrit as the proliferating factor in Dravidian language formation.[141]

The discovery of the classics formed a crucial area of Tamil identity. The first motivating factor was the modernisors and

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[138] Ibid., pp.121-123.
[139] *Manonmaniyam*, op.cit., invocatory verses
[140] V.G.Surya Nayarana Sastriar, op.cit., pp.122-123; He has used the term 'Uyar tani cemmozhi' or unique classical language, Ibid, p.122-
[141] Y.Vincent Kumaradoss, *Robert Caldwell: A Scholar Missionary in Colonial South India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008); V.Ravindiran, "The unanticipated Legacy of Robert Caldwell and the Dravidian Movement" *South Indian Studies*, ed. M.S.S.Pandian, No.1, Jan-June 1996,.

traditionalists desire to sit erect and negotiate with the British with unquestionable pride. The sublimity and historicity were expected to generate the necessary elevation in status. The commencement of the functioning of the Government Oriental Manuscript Library at Madras (1869) the Department of Archaeology (1872) and the release of the 'South Indian Inscriptions' –vol.1 (1892) had provided the parallel inspiration. The historical studies based on the inscriptions revealed the fact that the Tamils had a long history and that the immediate pre-British period need not be relied upon for comparison and generation of the counter hegemony to the cultural domination of the British. Hence it could be surmised that the discovery of the classics was a movement and not a mere 'U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar—Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliyar meeting' episode.[142]

Ramalinga's Tamil identity differed qualitatively from that of the other modernisors based on his perception of language modernisation itself. He had prepared his 'Note on the Nomenclature of Tamil' reliably before 1858, the year of his departure from Chennai.[143] Far from being a counter to the views of the Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram Mutt, the ideas expressed in the 'Note' preceded the view of any modernist on the subject. It was coeval with the publication of Robert Caldwell's (1814-

[142] Mylai Seeni Venaktaswami, op.cit., pp. U.V.Swaminatha Iyar, *En Carittiram* (1950; rpt. Madras: U.Ve.Sa. Nul Nilayam, 1982); *Sri Meenaatci Sundaram Pillai Avargal Carittiram* (1933, 1934), 2 parts (Madras: Liberty Printing press, 1940).
[143] *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi,* op.cit., pp. 214-216; the following discussion is based on the packed information provided in these pages. Since the sentences are packed with more than one information, separate references have been avoided.

1891) 'A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages' in 1856 from London. Ramalinga's 'Note', however, appeared in print only in 1897.

For Ramalinga, Tamil was the "Natural living language of true glory" (*Iyarkai unmai cirappu iyal moli*). Coupled with this were the two assertions that *Bharatha Kanda* was the *Yogabhumi* and 'Tamil the language of salvation or *anubhuthi*. Put together, these assertions had provided a 'hit' on the language of the rulers which belonged to the world of bodily pleasures or *bhoga bhumi*, attained glory through colonization, and underwent metamorphosis without a well defined grammatical structure. All the land outside 'this place' was mostly tuned to the crimes while the latter remained mostly tuned to goodness. Salvation meant the establishment of a social order providing 'uninturrupted total natural joyfulness' and Tamil was best suited to effect the said transformation. Through it alone the message of 'education for deathlessness' could be delivered as it was the *ten mozhi* or representative language of the South.

Long before V.G.S.Sastri who defined Tamil as a classical language or *cemmozhi*, Ramalinga had defined it as the primary classical language or *pithur Basha* of the world languages.[144] 'Tamil as the first language' theorists of the later centuries like Deva Neya Pavanar and Perunchittiranar have had the legacy of Ramalinga in this regard. With a clear philosophical insight Ramalinga could state that Tamil was easier

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[144] Ibid., p.214.

to learn and write both poetry and prose than Sanskrit, Maratha and Telugu. The implication was that Tamil was unique not only among the Dravidian languages but over the North and Central Indian languages as well. When the Maratha Bramins were dominating the government services and the Telugu non-Bramins the economic scenario and when Sanskrit enjoyed government patronage, Ramalinga was quite specific in projecting the cause of the non-Bramin Tamils through his concept of Tamil supremacy.[145] For him, Tamil was a masculine language which did not rely on the pomp of the alphabets and parading of vocabulary but on the phonemic structure which was quite adaptive.[146] Evidently Ramalinga was a pioneer Tamilologist.

Given the uniqueness of Ramalinga as a modernisor, one has to trace the basis of his deviant stance in the historical context. Two crucial areas of his comprehension dynamic have demanded critical inquiry. First was his holistic perception of the contemporary reality as revealed by his conceptualisations of that reality. The second was his ability to identify the emerging correlation of class forces among the vast masses of the peasantry. These two constituting Ramalinga's reform perspective would form the format of the subsequent two chapters of the thesis. The third chapter would deal with the cultural-ideological critique and the fourth, the structural critique.

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[145] Ibid., p.215, Anil Seal, op.cit.
[146] Ibid., pp.215-216.

CHAPTER V

THE NEGATION AND AFFIRMATION: THE MOVEMENT STRATEGIES

Ramalinga relied on *anma arivu* or wisdom of the soul as against *prayojana arivu* or knowledge of intellect. For him, the movement against hunger was aimed at *para inbam* or that which enriched the soul as against the other humanitarian acts which ensured *apara inbam* or sensual pleasures. From illuminating everyday experience first through the symbol of *manu* and the *vel erukku,* then making direct and explicit exposures of the horrors of contemporary life with much more sharpness, Ramalinga had finally penetrated deep into the social structure and identified the emerging class structure among the vast masses of the peasantry. Besides, he had also identified the oppressive external cultural milieu with its historical and contemporary overlappings. His was, therefore, not merely a consciousness of the everyday experience but a class consciousness involving strata **two** and **three** [emphasis mine] of the colonial peasant differentiation spectrum. Evidently, Ramalinga, alongwith his *Saadhus* desired to constitute a leading group conscious of launching a systematic educational activity for effecting the desired social change.

The *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sanga* sponsored by St.Ramalinga was not a mere organisation but a movement which had taken shape through his continued interaction with the rural masses. He was not a self-styled leader with careerist ambitions but a mass leader

who could learn from the masses and lead them in their actual struggles. His movement was a historical continuum as it had comprehended all the forms of contemporary unrest taking shape from the early Company era[1]. On the contrary, it was not an expression of mere outburst like the earlier movements but a consciously shaped and collectively interacted transformative praxis. How Ramalinga evolved his movement strategies from his interaction with the rural masses and their social intercourse would constitute the major argument in this chapter.

Four periods of the Movement Phase

Ramalinga was aware that all the earlier and contemporary unrest forms were only bare negations which did not offer an alternative paradigm. He had decided to effect changes in the status quo by sponsoring a movement with a programme of conscientisation. His perception of the differentiation spectrum indicated the fact that he intended to effect a new correlation of class forces. His analysis of the *Padha-Madha* hegemony could reveal his desire for promoting the counter hegemony at the cultural level. Finally Ramalinga was aware of the overlapping effect of the cultural-ideological superstructure over the basic material relations in the Indian context. Given these conditions, Ramalinga had decided to evolve the movement strategies stage by stage.

[1] For want of space, these early and contemporary forms of peasant uprisals have not been dealt with in this thesis. The Ten forms of protest recorded in Ramalinga's writings were: anomic begging; repeated conversions; alien settlement; fatalist grief; suicide; negation of the Bramanical religion; Sankritisation; protesting to adopt commercial cultivation; desertion of cultivation; and resorting to futile disputes and violence.

These strategies would be summed up in this chapter in their historical shaping. They constitute the embedded layers of the totality of his message. Ramalinga's qualitative evolution occurred during the *karunguzhi-Vadalur-Mettukuppam* phase of his life (1858-1874). Within this phase four distinct periods could be delineated. The first was the shaping of the *Sanmarga* philosophy period (1858-1865); the second was the period of the shaping of the *Sanmarga* movement at the perspectives and practice levels (1865-1867); the third was the period of mass mobilisation strategies (1867-1870); and the fourth was the period of the emancipation strategies (1870-1874). The strategies could also be labelled as those of the *Sanmarga, Sanga, Saalai* and *Sabhai.*

Period 1: Shaping the *Sanmarga* Philosophy (1858-1865) Re-definition as a Continuum Strategy

Ramalinga had begun to shape the *sanmarga* philosophy in stages during his stay at *Karunguzhi.* He had started re-defining the traditional concepts with a view to making *sanmarga* a historical continuum though it differed qualitatively from the *ezhu piravi* [Seven Births] explanations, p.258). At the same time he had decided to concretise its newness explicitly. Both were achieved simultaneously from the following strategies which could be discerned from the seemingly contradictory statements on the same theme:

1. The *Anthantha* strategy

Sanmarga was declared as the *anthantha* or *uttaram*, or logical culmination, of *vedantha* and *Siddhantha* which constituted the base or commencement or *purvam*.[2] Ramalinga had used the *purvam-uttaram* or commencement-end definition as against causation or *kaaranam* > *karanam* approach. He had further explained that *Sanmarga*, being at the higher stratum, subdued every *antha* or end as the *purvam* verily by its supreme status.

2. The Demarcation Strategy

Having given a take off for the *sanmarga* concept, Ramalinga was quick to effect its demarcation for establishing its specific identity. This was done by prefixing the two terms *samarasa* and *suddha* to *sanmarga*. The *anthantha* explanation got concretised into a separate term *samarasa* meaning supreme over everything (pp.299, 302). *Suddha* preceding *sanmarga* meant 'none of this' or 'not this' type of negation of *samaya-madha* (pp.299, 303). It meant a leap over the *samaya-madha* hegemony and transcendence of the experiences caused by them. *Sanmarga* meant the way to truth or reality (p.303). Again Ramalinga was quick to make a demarcation regarding the contextual range of truth or reality. Truth was not to be understood merely as mundane or highly abstract but covering the whole gamut of the ordinary to the

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[2] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Urainadai Pagudi* (1972: 2nd ed. Madras: Ramalingar Pani Manram, 1981), pp.299-302, Subsequent references within parentheses are from this edition.

extraordinary (p.300). Starting with the citing of similarity with the traditional fourth *marga* (pp.301 & 302), Ramalinga had finally transformed the traditional term by providing the re-interpretative connotation of a clear break with the past. At the same time he had avoided a confrontation with the *vedanthists* and *siddhanthists* by the use of the prefixing term *samarasa* also meaning commonness.

3. Negation but not Denial Strategy

Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga was a negation of *samaya madha* but that was to be made understood only gradually with much difficulty to start with. Ramalinga had to think much and re-interpret the conventional notions without antagonising them. For him *sanmarga* was a refutation or *maruppu* (p.299), transcendence or *kadandadu* (p.300), a leap or *taandinadu* (p.302) with reference to *samaya-madha* but at the same time, stood *ananya* or not alien (p.299). The *ananya* concept was the starting point for the later divergence. Similar was the approach towards the four *saivite margas* for individual redemption – *dhasa* or slave, *sat putra* or son, *saha* or friend and *sanmarga* (union). Ramalinga had re-interpreted them as constituting the social behavioural patterns. *Sanmarga* would then mean oneness with humanity. Such a radical departure needed a compromising approach at the start. Ramalinga had explained that the *sanmarga* of his, in relation to that of *samaya-madha,* was “not that, but not devoid of that” (p.300).

4. Reduction Strategy

Ramalinga was the teacher for the ordinary people who were largely ignorant of the subtleties and niceties of the theological disputes but cherished as values the things that they had been exposed to by tradition. Ramalinga was aware that the people would not continue, to hear anything which was unintelligible at the first instance. He had adopted a reduction strategy to present much complicated matters with striking simplicity. The *anthas, samayas, madhas* and *margas* were reduced to the unitary conception of *sanmarga* by a reductive strategy

5. Advocating *Sivam* Centred Monism Strategy

Sanmarga in its final shape was a monistic philosophy with its triple tenets of one god, one religion and one world [*orumai kadavul, orumai samayam,* and *orumai ulagiyal*] respectively). The one God, to start with, was not the ultimately perceived *Arul Perum Jothi Aandavar* but only *Sivam* (p.365) Probably Ramalinga's strategy was to lessen the saivite opposition. Secondly he had abstracted *Sivam* from the personifications of institutional religion. Thirdly, Ramalinga had applied his knowledge of *Sivagnana Siddhiyar,* one of the fourteen *Sasthras* of Saiva Siddhantha philosophy, which stated that whatever god one worshipped, *siva* would appear and bless in that form.[3]

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[3] Sivagnana Swamigal Peravai (Pub.) Sivagnana Siddhiar Subakkam (Vikramasinga Puram, 2001), v.115.

6. Alternate Maha Vaakya Strategy

Both *vedantha* and *siddhantha* had the backing of the *maha vaakyas* in Sanskrit. Hence the negation of both would deprive *sanmarga* of the divine possession of the *maha vaakyas.* Ramalinga was aware of the possible lowering of status arising from the lack and hence projected the Tamil *mey mozhi* [word of truth] *ulagelaam* [all in the world in *om*] as the alternative. It was not the word of saints or the minor gods but *para Siva Vaakya* or the pronouncement of Lord Siva himself as attested in Sekkizhar's *Periya Puraanam* (p.134). Besides being divine, it was secular as it remained de-linked from the *varnasrama dharma* (p.132). The strategy had thus effected both Tamilisation and secularisation to counter Sanskrit hegemony.

7. Divine Revelation Strategy

The *vedas* and 'agamas' were said to be of divine origin. While expounding any component of *sanmarga,* Ramalinga had begun to supplement any of his statement with a divine revelation or direction. He would even swear in the name of truth. The strategy, evidently, was to solemnise *sanmarga* and had become part of Ramalinga's stylistics since 1858. It was with the same stylistics that Ramalinga had reviewed his own past in terms of divine revelation and guidance.

Period-2: The Organisational Strategies (1865-1867) Framing the Perspectives Strategies or *Sanga* Strategies

1. The *Kuuttam* Strategy [Mass Gathering]

The individuals would hear and go. The *kuuttam* or *sanga* [Mass gathering] would concretise the temporary awareness into a control dynamic for continued internalisation, learning through experience, and practical action. From individual towards the collective would mean the socialisation of the self and the starting point for meaningful interaction under an unfolding paradigm. The individual vagaries would get eliminated as against the concentration of the human essence. Ramalinga was very particular with the *anushttikkira kuuttam* (pp.298, 302-302) (Practising collective) for *Sanmarga.* Ramalinga was not for the mere interpretation of the world, but for practical action to change it. The mere imparter of knowledge had started undergoing the transformation into an educator. The term *anushttikkira* would mean regular observance and disciplined characteristic of a voluntary organisation.

2. Vedic Attribute Strategy

Ramalinga had decided to launch the *sanga* avoiding any confrontation with Vedism at the beginning. At the same time he did not desire to dilute the meaning of *sanmarga.* Both were implied in his explanations. *Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangam* (1865) was the name given. It was defined as "a collective for the observance of those which

were common to all religious belief systems, the ultimate findings of the works of wisdom and those of the latter's fourth *marga* (pp.298, 301-302). Evidently this definition was quite elusive. At the same time Ramalinga had intended to create a *sanga* for implementing the *sanmarga* of the *samarasa Veda,* the work of wisdom [*veda*] which was supreme over all the *vedas. Veda* was interpreted as the expression of human wisdom as against that of divine revelation. This strategy could be understood from the fact that Ramalinga had intended to evolve a *samarasa veda* ever since he launched the *sanmarga sanga,* which by all evidence, had ultimately come out as *jiva kaarunya* philosophy (p.75).

3. *Sanga* for the ordinary Souls Strategy

For Ramalinga the *sanga* and *sanmarga* were only the tools for the end and not the end in themselves. The *sanga* was for the ordinary people who were only to attain the form of wisdom at the end. For this, while being in the *sanga,* they had to be the *saadagas* or practising trainees as against the *Saadhyas* who needed no such training (p.301). Ramalinga's socialist paradigm envisaged the collective attainment of the *suddha deha* and *gnana deha* which symbolically represented material and mental blossoming (p.301). The *sanga* would orient the souls in this direction. For Ramalinga the *mano sangarpa* (p.258) or mental conviction was birth and its forgetfulness death. The *sanga* would contribute to

deathlessness by keeping alive the *mano sangarpa* and by facilitating *karana vagai samaadhi* or *sanmargic* practical action continuum (p.301).

4. *Siva* for *Jiva Nyaya* Strategy

Samarasa Sanmarga for Ramalinga, represented the *jiva nyaya* or human concern, as against the *madha nyaya* or religious concern (pp.300, 302, 303). To avoid a possible misinterpretation, 'Siva' was made the President ex-officio of the *sanga* and thereby, the custodian of *jiva nyaya*[4] *Sanmarga* was unique among *para marga* (various paths).[5]

5. Recruitment Strategy

The aspirations of the individuals would merge into the collective aspirations which constituted the paradigm for a *Sanga.*[6] Enrolment into the *sanga* would gradually sharpen the perception of the individuals along the practical actions being shaped within the scope of the paradigm. Individuals being enlightened by the *sanga* and the *sanga's* paradigm being enriched by the interactions with individuals would be continuous processes.[7] Getting organised has been the pre-requisite for conscientisation.[8] That Ramalinga was aware of this was evident from his recruitment strategy. He cherished the perspective of bringing 'any soul' into the fold of the *sanga* [*adaivittu*] and 'correcting' it [*tirutti*], he could

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[4] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*,(Chennai:Ramalingar Pani Mandram,1980).V.5621.
[5] Ibid., V.4723, 5506, 5507.
[6] Ibid., V.3703, 3895, 5563, 5599.
[7] Ibid., V.4631.
[8] Ibid., V.5602.

aim at establishing *sanmarga*.[9] He was clear that by using **'any tactic'** one should be enrolled into the *sanga* [*perupadesam* pp.356-357]. This had been his practice ever since the formation of the *sanga* but recorded only later.

6. Creation of Cadres Strategy

Any mass movement must essentially have the vanguards or cadres who would stabilise and help spread the movement and provide the necessary ideological orientation to practical action. Ramalinga had the necessary perspective to create the vanguards for the *sanmarga* movement. They were the *Saadhus*.[10]

7. Salvation on Earth Strategy

Ramalinga's perspective on worldly life was that the latter was pivotal for human salvation. For him *Siva anubhavam* or experience in *Siva* and *siddhi* or salvation were earthly life centred. *Param* or that which was considered as the 'other' of *igam* or this world must be realised in the latter alone through *sanmarga*.[11] Evidently Ramalinga's movement perspective ran along the popular aspirations.[12] His humility, besides being a value, was a strategy to establish total identity with the

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[9] Ibid., V.5485, 5514, 5527, 5528.
[10] Ibid., V.4723, 5599.
[11] Ibid., V.5485.
[12] Ramalinga had recorded the sorrow (varuttam) of the people, their agony (vedanai), tension (ulaical), 'tiredness' (kalaippu), frustration (vaattam), the prevalence of fear and misery (accam, avalam) and wickness and killings (pulai, kolai) the regulatory prescriptions of conflict ('*kalaga acara*'), disharmony (*orumai inmai*) and fear of death (*marana bayam*,) in *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, v.3289, 3322, 3407-3408, 3431, 3783, 4503, 4726, 5382, 5508, 5572, 5579, 5799. Ramalinga presented '*sanmarga*' not as the philosophy of negation of *igam* but realisation in it *param* itself. C.Subramanya Bharathi later on followed the dictum with his assertion "*Mannil Teriyudhu vaanam*" and "*Vaanagam Ingu Kaivara Vendum*" (the sky appears on earth" and "the heavens shall be obtained here)

people.[13] *Para upagaaram* meant the help to be rendered for the attainment of the *para* in *iga* and another operative factor for the movement was *sat vicara* or contemplation on the truth of things and phenomena (pp.311-312). The dialectical relationship between theory and practice was conceived in terms of empirical life situations. Prayer, according to Ramalinga, must enable one to realise oneself in the upliftment of the world and not project oneself into the world, *Caadhanas* [tools] are not required; one tool would be suggested and one might smile to see a spark in its application, develop ego and turn bad. Therefore, without making further delay, one must aspire to have a perception of all the humans as one. This is the tool. One who developed this aspiration would be the one to raise the dead to life; he would be god himself" (p.312). This concept was further elaborated in *Jiva kaarunya Ozhukkam* (pp.74-75).

8. Contextualing the Movement Strategy

Toluvur Velayudha Mudaliyar's Theosophical Society Parallelism has misled scholars like S.Amirthalingam to universalise the movement negating its specificity. The terms *ellavarum,* (all) *evvuyirum* (any soul), and *ulagar anaivaraiyum* (all the souls of the world) have been interpreted to mean 'universality'.[14] Ramalinga had only followed the

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[13] He wanted to be one among the '*sanmarguists*' and he requested the members not to call him the president. Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., v.5452.
[14] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Alumai Uruvaakkam* (Chennai: The Parkar, 2004) pp.163-165.

Tamil tradition of referring to the Tamil land as the world or *ulagu*. Besides, he himself was clear in contextualing his movement. He was quite specific in stating that those who were to be enveloped within the *Sanmarga* movement and corrected were those "darkened inside and pale outside" [*agatte karuttum puratte veluttum*][15]. The paleness caused by fear and terror would explain the nature of darkness of the mind caused by the objective reality. Ramalinga was primarily concerned with the oppressed in contemporary Tamil society. The reference to the people as *Ulagar* was crucial. The term meant agriculture.[16] Ramalinga had also peasantised *Sanmarga* by a striking comparison between the holistic nature of the processes involved in both and the exclusive reliance on the ultimate reach by the *Samaya-Madha*. While *Sanmarga* and cultivation covered a whole range of processes from ploughing the field to the storage of the grain in the *Kalanciya'*(granary) the *samaya-Madhas* were only concerned with the last act. The statement bore the connotation that *Sanmarga* was concerned with those involved in the cultivation processes while *Samaya-Madhas* belonged to those who reaped the harvest.[17] This symbolism has missed the scholarly perception all through, though very crucial as such.

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[15] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai,* op.cit., v.5485.
[16] M.Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1899), p.906, "Ulakam (Tamil)> '*uloka*' (early SKT > '*loka*' (field).
[17]Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumuai* , op.cit., v.5567 would justify the inference.

9. *Sanmarga* as a Process Strategy

Defining *Sanmarga* in terms of some negating *Samaya-Madha* Joining to form the *Sanga* and then correcting others to effect social change of mind would be a simplistic version as against the perception of Ramalinga.[18] The idealist metaphysics would reduce *Sanmarga* to mere change of heart or state of mind. To negate *Samaya-Madha* without a feeling of affinity or as untruth was itself a struggle.[19] Ramalinga himself had narrated in *Perupadesam* how he had struggled to change over the years (p.355). The use of past tense (p.307) freely at will to depict the future effect of *Sanmarga* was only part of Ramalinga's stylistics inherited from tradition.[20] The *Samaya-Madhas* themselves were the cultural *tadais* or hurdles for *Sanmarga*. There were ultimately the structural hurdles too. Ramalinga made a crusade against both. Even if salvation was considered in isolation, it was a process, for, according to Ramalinga, *Samaya-Madha acara* being made to fade away, *Sattiya gnana acara* (the experience of the truth of wisdom) being made hegemonic, the oneness or *podumai* being realised, the *kaarunya* or comradely action would become prevalent and lead to *Siddhi* or salvation (emancipation) (pp.309. 313-314, 349, 353-355, 357, 444-445, 452)

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[18] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Anuku Muraikal*, op.cit., pp.70-81.
[19] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumuai*, op.cit., v.3319, 3766.
[20] "Poliga, Poliga, poliga, Poyirru Valluyir Caabam" was the assertion of the Vaisnavite Bakthi tradition.

10. Sloganising the Movement Strategy

Ramalinga's perspective on movement had enabled him to make slogans for the movement which would make the *Sanmarga* philosophy grip the masses:

- Don't shake, don't move!
  Don't believe this deceitful world! (v.5527)
- Throw away grief
  Be bold and join! (v.3528)
- Toiled the most, reaped the least, deserted your life! (v.5567)
- My way is the deathless *Sanmarga*! (v.4960)
- The unthought of shall have to be thought one day! (v.4465)
- We should resurrect the dead again, here! (v.4082)
- This rule of the merciless shall go;
  The rule of the lovers of grace must come! (v.5618)
- The equals, superior and inferior
  And anyone must become one
  Sharing power in the world! (v.4082)
- What is your way?
  What is happiness?
  How is your life? (v.5563)
- The dust of darkening caste dogmas
  Manures must they be for the field gone dry!

The deluding castes, religions, paths and institutions

Must be laid into a pit and buried into the ground! (v.4654)

- Grace, the supreme Light; Grace, the Supreme Light!

  Unique mercy, Grace the supreme light! (p.359)

***Sanmarga* in Practice Strategies**

1. Idol worship for the *Apakkuvas* strategy

Though Ramalinga had begun to realise the only god transcending all the *Samaya-Madhas* he had adopted only that strategy which would help him in organising the people in the beginning. Though he did not accept idol worship, he could not negate the people who worshipped many deities, big or small, with their idols having been soleminised by the *Samaya-Madhas* from a remote past.[21] The temple had also concretised idol worship, be it Vedic or non-vedic.[22] In hid debate with the *Brahmo Samajists*, Ramalinga could defend idol worship by raising the relative *pakkuva* or maturity of the souls [*Nadandha vannam Uraittal*, pp.505-511]. The mature souls were the *Saadhyas* who needed no *saadhana* or orientation (tool or path); the *Saadhagas* were those who were to be the *apakkuvas* who remained immersed in idol worship with an intransitive state of consciousness. For Ramalinga, to seek salvation through idol worship was the *mandhar nyaya* or the view point of the ordinary people (p.269). He was neither apologetic later on as has been

[21] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumuai*, op.cit., v.4726; Urainadai Pagudi, op.cit., p.452.
[22] There were temples even for the smaller deities which raised horror: Ibid, v.3472.

viewed by Amirthalingam, nor was he worried about the possible incentive to atheism against the backdrop of negation of idol worship as has been stated by Uran Adigal.[23] Idol worship was a fact to reckon with and not to be recommended negation at ease, for Ramalinga was mainly concerned with the *mandhas* who either remained tied up with the gods of *samaya-Madhas* or worshiped the smaller deities with magical charm.[24] The tightening of the caste hierarchy had, in turn, frozen the cult practices and community worship under the colonial dispensation.

2. Gradation Debars Wisdom Strategy

The *mandhas* continued to be embarrassed by caste, religion and sect and could not overcome their temptations to dwell in the mud of the *Sasthras*.[25] The rustics worshipped innumerable smaller deities and offered sacrifices to them to quench their thirst for blood. The former looked upon the latter with contempt while, for Ramalinga both had to be mobilised for the *Sanga*. 'Two mangoes with one stone' approach was set into practice by Ramalinga utilising the yardsticks of benefit of worship and graded status of the gods. All the gods were grouped together far below the god of wisdom. Ramalinga asserted that all the gods of *Samaya-Madha* were also minor deities;[26] they were all mere particles of

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[23] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Alumai Uruvaakkam*, op.cit., pp.148-149, Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru* (1971; 2nd ed. Vadalur: Samarasa Sanmarga Araycci Nilayam, 1976) p.308.
[24] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumuai*, op.cit., v.3472.
[25] Ibid. v.3319.
[26] Ibid. v.4178.

dust.[27] These atomised gods were of graded status and benefits were to be obtained from them truly [*Saalam*] but meagrely [*arpa payan* or *lecam*] and slowly [*dhamasam*] (pp.269, 305-306). The said benefits were only the *bhogas* or the pleasures of material wealth. *Bhoga* caused ego or *ahankara* and consequent death. Ramalinga told the people grieved over *bhoga* that here was not much use in worshipping the gods of the *samaya-madhas* (p.305) and that it had been revealed to him (p.306) that those who needed the total bliss must get into the *sanga* leaving the misdirected path of *padha-praapti* or possession (p.305). Worship of the gods of *Samaya-Madha* was a hurdle to total salvation (p.305).

3. Two way approach to mobilisation Strategy

The key to understanding the basic dynamic of Ramalinga's movement was the two way mobilisation strategy he had adopted. This strategy also got transformed with time. Simultaneously Ramalinga had applied two different prescriptions for two groups of differing socio-cultural orientation. It could be interpreted that he had concentrated on the mobilisation of one group and aimed at establishing harmony between that and the other:

Prescription 1

a. Leave *kama* (lust) and *krodha* (aversion)
b. Negate *pulai* (meaness) and *kolai* (killing) (p.307)

Prescription 2

[27] Ibid. v.5015.

a. *Arul Vadivaay nirral* (Be gracious)

b. '*Suddha karanamaay nirral* (be harmless in deeds) (p.307)

Prescription 3

a. *Jiva dhosham vicaariyaamai* (don't discriminate)

b. *Dhur Vishayam parraamai* (don't cling to wickedness) (p.309)

Prescription 4

a. *Bedham ninga* (Negate inequality)

b. *Akkiramattil celuttaamai* (avoid cruelty) (p.309)

Prescription 5

a. *Pirar kurram vicaariyaamai* (don't find fault)

b. *Kedudhi nikki sattuvamaadhal* (be soft and pure) (p.310)

Period 3: Mass Mobilisation Strategies (1867-1870)

***Saalai* Strategies [Mass Integration Programme]**

1. *Aagaara Dharma Viruddhi* Strategy

According to Dhandapani Swamigal [1839-1898], Ramalinga was unique in translating what he had stated into practical action for implanting it on the soil.[28] His reference was to the launching of the *Sattiya Veda Dharma Saalai* at Vadalur in 1867. The venue has been much discussed in terms of significance but not the organisation as such.[29] After two years of sponsoring the *Sanmarga* movement, Ramalinga had begun to adopt mass mobilisation strategies, to give an

[28] The dedicative verse offered for *Jiva kaarunya Ozhukkam* (SMK edition) quoted in Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit., p.342.

[29] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Anuku Muraikal*, op.cit., pp.88-90.

impetus to the movement with mass integration programmes. These strategies were affirmative as compared to the earlier ones which were mostly re-interpretative. The affirmative stress was explicitly on *Jiva Nyaya* or the human cause as against the *Samaya Nyaya* or religious cause.

For Ramalinga man had emerged into a higher species of conscious action (p.424). The birth of humanity itself had set a goal known as the *jiva nyaya.* All the humans had the right to live a life of uninterrupted total natural joyfulness on earth (pp.51, 424). *Sanmarga* was not merely the negation of *Samaya Madha* but the affirmation of the *prayojanam* (p.424) or attainment of human existence. The *prayojanam* was the recognition of the oneness of humanity in all and consequent comradely fellowship called *Jiva Kaarunya.*

The new mobilisation strategy had become hunger – centred and, thereby, mass-centred. *Aagaara Dharma Virudhi* (p.423) or the ethic of providing food for the hungry was placed alongside the *Sanmarga Dharma Viruddhi* or the ethic of the truth of wisdom and even made the essential pre-requisite for the latter. *Anma laba* or spiritual benefit thus became humanity centred instead of being religious (p.426).

Ramalinga had a clear movement perspective on the removal of hunger. First he was categorical that the action should be participatory [*palar sahaayam aadhal*] and not individually sponsored (p.425). He

aimed at promoting solidarity of those who could spare something with the dispossessed through participation in the mass action of providing food for the latter against the backdrop of the new drive for *anma laba* (p.426). Ramalinga had also made use of the fact that hunger was common to all and, therefore, was felt by all. By citing the feeling of hunger naturally occurring to the privileged, Ramalinga could conscientise them to realise the horrors of hunger being faced ceaselessly by the underprivileged who had had no grip over their plight (pp.425-426). Thirdly, the large scale participatory hunger removal programme was aimed at facilitating mass contact and popular support for the *Sanga*. Around three thousand people had attended the inauguration of the *Saalai* (p.480) Evidences have revealed the fact that the support from the people was overwhelming (pp.473, 481).

2. Counter Hegemony Strategy

With the launching of the *Saalai*, Ramalinga had simultaneously begun to set into force the counter hegemony to *Samaya-Madha*. Earlier he had contemplated on writing the *Samarasa Veda*. This was renamed as *Podu Veda* with secular overtones (p.401). But this was also at the contemplative stage till then. Ramalinga had also desired to write on *Ulagiyal Vilakkam* and *Sanmarga Vilakkam* (pp.400-401) With the reading of a part of *Jiva Karrunya Ozhukkam* on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Saalai*, it must be presumed that Ramalinga had

dopped all his earlier endeavours and stuck to writing *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* as the finale of those endeavours.[30] The reference to this work aș part of *Sanmarga Vilakkam* or *Podu Vedam* was only casual and hence the date of commencement of writing this work need not be fixed retrospectively as has been done by Uran Adigal.[31] Since the work remained unfinished and was published only after the disappearance of Ramalinga, it could be reasonably assumed that Ramalinga was revising, expounding anew and improving the basic tenets of *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* through his discourses since 1867.[32] They were:

- If there existed *karmic* effect of suffering, there also existed the human brotherly right to redeem (pp.52-55)
- If the *Valiya Jivas* could be indifferent towards the *eliya jivas* the *kaarunya jivas* would emerge to emancipate the latter (pp.56-57);
- People had not only the *jiva swathanthra* or the right to exist but the *vallaba swathanthra* or the right to change the world through labour (pp.57-61)
- Privileged status or poverty was not merely 'karmic' but related to the ownership or otherwise of the resource endowments (pp.57, 65) and

[30] Uran Adigal, Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru, op.cit., p.355
[31] Ibid., pp.286-287
[32] The available three parts would give the impression that the first would have been the revised version of the second and third.

- Death by hunger was murder itself; *jiva karunya* must lead to deathlessness (pp.59,61)

3. Threat of Punishment Strategy

According to Ramalinga, joining the movement was voluntary on the part of one but not its practice. The quality of the movement depended on the adherence of its members to the programmes launched. Censure must be effected wherever necessary. Ramalinga had issued the threats of punishment against insincerity to the programme of *jiva kaarunya*. Two of them were crucial:

- Without *jiva kaarunya*, the life on earth would be in jeopardy; disorder would prevail [p.56]; and
- When the people turned indifferent towards *jiva kaarunya*, they would inevitably lose whatever 'status and luxury' they enjoyed [p.57]

The threat of punishment quite explicitly revealed the fact that it was specifically directed towards those who, in comparison with the underprivileged, were better privileged in the social order. The message was crystal clear that they should not look 'above' for survival but 'below' wherein lay the real security or insecurity in terms of order. 'Above' this strata were the *valiya jivas* wearing the 'hard glasses' (p.53, 56)

4. Parallel Missions Strategy

That the launching of the *Saalai* was perceived as a mass contact programme for the *Sanga* was evident from the fact that Ramalinga had contemplated on launching many supportive programmes:

- Offering medical help [*vaidhya Saalai*]
- Imparting knowledge [*sasthra saalai*]
- Helping the needy [*upagaara Saalai*]
- Facilitating meditation [*upaacana Saalai*]
- Training in Yoga [*yoga Saalai*]
- Planning and Development [*Vruddhi Saalai*]
- Guidance and Counselling [*Vyavahaara Saalai*]

Following Uran Adigal the scholars have corporatised them.[33] The available piece of evidence has only offered the scope that, following the inauguration of the *Saalai*, the members of the *Sanga* were enthused to arrive at an agreement that they could help the people further to strengthen the *Sanga* (p.426). One should also believe that help should have been rendered to the extent possible, for example, Ramalinga was offering *Vyavahaara* and *Vaidhya* help (pp.388, 415). That any formal approach in this context was anathema to Ramalinga's mission was evident from the *muda munda Vidhwan* episode which revealed

[33] Uran Adigal has eulogised the institutions to such an extent that the *Sanmarga Bodhini Pada Sala*, which never took off, would have turned into a multi-language higher education center if it had survived; see Ibid. *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, p.370. Amirthalingam has relied on the Theosophical Society Parallelism advocated by Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar, Ibid., *Vallalaarin Alumai Uruvakkam*, op.cit., pp.292-313.

Ramalinga's concern for being intelligible to the people as against the elitist projection of one's capabilities.[34] For Ramalinga, any supportive programme must be on a small scale and enable the *Sanga* grow from strength to strength. "conduct with ease" was his directive (p.429).

5. *Kaarunya* without Joint Pursuit

Ramalinga had earlier identified two groups forming the potential membership base for the *sanga* and had evolved two lines of dialogue to negotiate with them. The *Saalai* had been launched facilitating mass interaction. But, even then, Ramalinga could observe the intrusion of the distancing factor pulling the two groups into polesepart. For *jiva kaarunya* to effect the unity at least in the future, a new strategy had to be adopted to result in parallel existence without hostility to the mass contact programmes. *Kaarunya* without joint pursuit was the newly invented strategy. The dispossessed were to be fed and saved by the collective humane action of the comparatively privileged. But the privileged looked 'below' only with prejudice as thy looked 'above' for the status denied to them. The proposed mingling of the two potential groups could not be forced for the underprivileged group had to execute jobs which were meant and wicked in the purview of the elites. The two way strategy for effecting the dialogue adopted earlier was modified in the

[34] Ramalinga had directed Tozhuvur Velayudha Mudaliyar to conduct *Tirukkural* classes for the *Saalai* people. After three months, he had received the complaint that the progress was very slow. He asked his associates to summon the *muda munda vidhwan* and once he arrived, he directed him to be simple and intelligible. *Mudam Unda* meant the 'enlightened' while *muda munda* meant the 'ignorant'. Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varallaru*, op.cit., p.459

new context. *Jiva kaarunya* must continue and the poor must be saved by the actions of the better privileged and it must end there; conscientisation should remain restricted at one end until those at the other end got cleansed of the meanness and wickedness attributed to their living.[35] While the *Saadhu* status would elevate the first group on par with that above, the shedding of certain jobs segregatory at the social level would inevitably facilitate the former mingling with the group below.

6. Mass Communication Strategy

Any movement would necessitate regular communication channels. The journals have been a powerful mass communication channel. It could be considered as the movement in continuum. Ramalinga was aware of the need for a journal for keeping the regular communication with the members of the movement and to effect cadre education. He took the efforts to sponsor the journal *Sanmarga Vivega Viruddhi* [improving the Understanding of *Sanmarga*] with membership monthly contribution (pp.426-428). The contributors belonged to the *Aiyar, Chetty, Pillai, Mudaliyar, Nayakkar, Nayudu, Padaiyatci and Reddy* castes along with one *Sayabu* (Muslim).[36] Nearly eighty per cent belonged

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[35] Uran Adigal (ed.) Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai, Op.Cit., v.4159-4162

[36] In the history of the Tamil periodicals and dailies, Ramalinga belonged to the 'pre-Swdesamittiran' (1881) era. The five decades in between 1831 and 1881, the year of origin of the first Tamil periodical 'Tamil Magazine' and of 'Swedesamittiran' respectively, have constituted the liberal nationalist phase participated by the modernists comprising of the Western-educated middle class, administrative elite and commercial elite, the thirst for knowledge through liberal education and religious identity. The phase remained compartmentalised, incohesive and vague. Most of the periodicals were short lived. More than seventy five periodicals have been listed by Mylai Seeni Venkataswamy. The Hindu religious periodicals were sponsored by both the Brahmans and commercial elite non-Brahmans. The Christians magazines

to the low-income group. Though the response for sponsoring the journal was encouraging, it could not have been overwhelming against the backdrop of the prevailing poverty and illiteracy of the people backing the movement. More concerned as he was with the movement itself, Ramalinga should have dropped the move. The famine conditions should also have contributed to the said move. (pp.390, 394)

7. 'No Dispute on This' Strategy

Ramalinga's movement was run on democratic centralism. Ramalinga heard everybody but once the decision was taken, he was strict in its implementation. He did not allow any deviation or dilution as was evident from the *Muda Munda Vidhwan* episode. The crucial tenets were pronounced as "not to be disputed" (p.429) verdict. Coupled with this was the attribution of divinity strategy (pp.62, 306, 350, 359, 360, 366, 444, 450-452, 458)

Period 4: The *Siddhi Valaagam* Strategies (1870-1874)

1. Temple Centred Movement Strategy

Ramalinga leaving Vadalur and finally settling at *Mettu Kuppam* – *Siddhi Valaagam* Vaisnavite *Acarya* residence has not drawn adequate

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were mostly sponsored by the Protestants. There were some children's magazines and those catering to the needs of school education and teaching. The secular and general category periodicals like Udaya Taaragai (1845), Tamil Quarterly Repository (1854), Dina Vartta Maani (1855), District Gazette (1856) and Desepagaari (1861) showed some striking characteristics. In this context, Ramalinga's Sanmarga Vivega Viruddhi, if it had materialized, would have marked an unique era in the history of Tamil periodicals. See Sp.Shanmugam, *The Development Patterns of Tamil Periodicals with special Reference to the Consumer Periodicals: A Descriptive Study in Historical Perspectives* (Bharathidasan University, 1995); Mylai Seeni Venkataswamy, *Pottonpadaam Nurraandil Tamil Ilakkuyam* (Tiruchi: Alagappa Puthaga Nilayam, 1962).

critical attention. According to Uran Adigal, the people at *Karunguzhi* and *Mettu Kuppam* were *Vaisnavites* and they had requested Ramalinga to occupy the building at *Mettu Kuppam* which they had built for their *Acaryas* but was left unoccupied by the latter for quite long.[37] This was a simplistic version which could not explain as to why the residence was offered only after Ramalinga had settled at Vadalur. The offer was a community exercise and it could not have been effected with ease. If that was so, there should have been deeper reasons behind the move. Simultaneously, Ramalinga, for specific reasons, should have opted for the shifting of residence on his part also. For Amirthalingam, the people had begun to storm Vadalur and hence Ramalinga, the spiritualist seeking isolation, had exercised the said option.[38] This would vitiate the basic premise that Ramalinga was a man of the people, loved to be among the people, learnt from the people and conscientised the people. The second reason quoted by him has been that, probably, Ramalinga had a re-thinking on temple worship pattern after his debate with the *Brahmo Samajists* where he had argued in defence of idol worship for the *apakkuvas*.[39] That Ramalinga did not change his *pakkuva* theory of classification of the souls even during the *Valaagam* phase would nullify the argument. The third reason pointed out by Amirthalingam was crucial:

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[37] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru,* op.cit., pp.472-473.
[38] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Anuku Muraikal,* op.cit., p.91.
[39] Ibid., p.93.

> On the other hand, the external milieu of the political developments in the country, the sufferings of the people against the social inequity and the hegemonic impact of the religious sphere should have greatly upset Vallalar's mind. Therefore it is learnt that Vallalar would have aspired for and accepted change in worship pattern and social structure.[40]

But the author has not made any attempt to historically relate Ramalinga's socio-political and religious perspectives with the contemporary situation in his works except the religious and caste disputes.

From being *Saalai* centred, the movement had been turned *Saalai* and *Sabhai* centred from 1872. The reason must be traced to the *Saalai* itself which continued to cause worry to Ramalinga even during the *Vallagam* phase (p.434). At the same time, when both the *Saalai* and *Sabhai* turned frustrating Ramalinga only chose to issue whip to the *Saalai* but close the *Sabhai* (pp.434, 436-437).[41] It was evident, therefore, that Ramalinga while continuing with the *Saalai* experiment, had launched the *Sabhai* as a trial for resolving a crisis he had encountered at *Saalai. Andavar* [God] was to come to *Saalai* only and not to any other place(p.430).

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[40] Ibid., translation by self.
[41] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, Op.Cit., pp.593-594.

The directives issued to those at *Saalai* and the rules of ethic and prescribed routine rules for observance notified by Ramalinga from *Siddhi Valaagam* have provided the clues for the identification of the unhealthy developments which were observed by Ramalinga with reference to the functioning of the *Saalai* (pp.434, 436-437). They were: 1.Observing discrimination [*dhwesham paarttal*]; 2.Using abusive terms of aversion [*krodha, akrama, adhikrama vaarttaigal*]; 3.Cursing [*vaidhal*]; 4.Non-mingling [*maruvaamai*]; 5. No control over the senses [*vaay manam adangaamai*]; 6. Disbelief [*ava nambikkai*]; 7. 'my religion my god' disputes-exclusiveness [*valipaattu tadai*]; 8.not respecting senior guidance [*kattuppadaamai*]; 9.counter offensive [*edirttu candai idal*] and 10. not running the movement with ease [*laguvaay nadattaamai*] (p.429). Ramalinga should have realised that the two way strategy for mobilisation and *kaarunya* without joint pursuit' strategy had failed to precipitate the desired unity. The Vedic temple and idol worship not only perpetuated the hegemony of the *padha-madha* system but facilitated the religious domination of the socially privileged against the underprivileged and total exclusion of the un-privileged. Unity was not only culturally hindered but institutionally compartmentalised. A temple devoid of idols and Vedic envelop was expected by Ramalinga to provide the alternate model. The *Sattiya Gnana Sabhai* thus came into existence with a view to facilitating mass entry. The pioneer temple entry movement with non-

Vedic orientation had been launched in 1872. The same problems erupted again leading to the closure of worship at the *Sabhai; Saalai* remained as the only hope.

2. Need Abolition Strategy

Ramalinga had earlier found fault with the people for practising discrimination on the one hand and living the life of hateful deeds, ruggedness and hateful manners on the other. He had initially adopted a two way strategy of negotiating with them. Unable to make much headway, he had begun to tell the better privileged to adopt *jiva kaarunya* as the ideal and help the poor who would not become eligible to enter the movement until they dropped all their evil and averse habits. Even this did not work as was evident from the *Saalai* developments. At *Siddhi Valaagam,* Ramalinga had evolved a qualitatively different strategy to deal with the problem of segregation and discrimination. He had begun to grasp the roots of the problem. The aversion on the one side and cruelty on the other were only the effects before they became the causes. Mode of existence, or the being, had ultimately decided the human consciousness and consequent interaction. Possession fossilised human intercourse. When the dead had to be cremated, there had to be the people to do the job. When people ate animal flesh, there had to be the men of the slaughter houses. The roots of segregation would get eradicated when the material precipitating factors of segregation were

wiped out. Ramalinga categorically told the better privileged to leave faith in the possessions of the world (p.306) not to be misled by its deceitfulness,[42] stop eating animal flesh and ban cremation [*camadhi kattlai,* pp.429-430]. Ramalinga was also opposed to mourning for the dead and widowhood, for the rituals associated with them, in turn, brought 'pollution' to the persons who were involved in them from outside. Ramalinga's directive to the inmates of the *Saalai* with regard to burial and death was quite commanding. His seriousness with vegetarianism was evident from the burning of the thatched shed or *Pandhal* in front of the *Sabhai* erected by the non-vegetarian Marathas episode.[43] Evidently Ramalinga's movement base was the comparatively better privileged as against the dispossessed, though his concern for the latter was quite genuine. This should lead the way to unfolding the nature of his movement.

3. Holistic Truth and Explicit Action Strategy

Ramalinga had it in mind to write a work entitled *Unmai Vilakkam* [Defence of Truth p.401], but that did not materialise. Having entered into the *Valaagam* era, Ramalinga had decided that, for the spectre of *sanmarga* to haunt the world, he had to tell the whole truth (pp.347, 433) to the people leaving behind the earlier compromises and resort to explicit practical actions negating the earlier non-confrontationist

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[42] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., v.5527.
[43] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigal Varalaaru*, op.cit., p.498.

postures. The time had come for him to launch a polemical struggle in both the cultural-ideological and practical action spheres of the *sanmarga* movement.

At the cultural-ideological level, Ramalinga came out openly against the wise men of the past for having hidden the truth, obscured it, blurred it and even buried it [*perupadesam* pp.351-360]. There was nothing to inherit and one should not set one's mind on their writings. The golden age had not occurred and only the contemporary epoch was bound to witness the prevalence of *sanmarga* (p.360). *Sanmarga* itself was to be perceived not as the fourth *marga* or as *jiva nyaya* but as a new dharma as against those of *caadhi, varna* and *kula* (p.315). In fact, no channel was needed at all (p.312) for the evolution of the soul in its natural environment (pp.91, 315). All souls were one and the same and hence all were divine forms. One must realise oneself in the totality of souls (p.312).[44] It was a right to experience the comradely spirit in the unity of souls [*anma neya orumaippaattu urimai*] (p.432) and the souls in turn should experience within them the growth of the love of mankind [*daya vruddhi*] (p.314). *Sanmarga* was *jiva kaarunya* and it was the common path [*podu neri*] (p.347), the great path [*peru neri*] (p.348) and the unique sublime way [*tani peru neri*] (p.348). *Jiva kaarunya* was, therefore, not a mere ethic but a fellow human obligation since the ultimate goal of mankind was to make the human body evolve into

[44] Uran Adigal (ed.) *Tiru Arutpa: Aaraam Tirumurai*, op.cit., v.4076-4077, 5296-5298, 5451.

imperishable form of wisdom [*aliyaa vaaymai udambu*][45] ensuring the sublime life in deathlessness [*maranam illa peru vazhvu*] on earth.[46]

Ramalinga declared in precise terms that all the '*samaya-madhas*', their *agamas, Sasthras, Puranas, Vedas, Ithihasas* and *Manthras* were false [*poy*].[47] They should not be held as containing truth [*sattiya unarcci kollaadhu*] and must be left as such [*viduttal* p.349]. The real and only god, *perumpathi* (the Supreme Lord) was not anyone of the *samaya-madhas* nor was the *karttar* of the 'old and New Testaments' (p.431). He 'ruled over the rulers' [*andaarai anda deyvam*].[48] His coming to the *Saalai* was only imminent (p.430) and was to bless all.[49] Ramalinga declared that he had left all his faith in Saivism and held (p.355) continuous inquiry or *vicaara* into the truth of things and phenomena must replace faith (pp.351-352).

Ramalinga's practical action had become quite transparent and polemical thence forth. One of the signs of expression of antagonism to the *padha-Madha* hegemony and the forces perpetuating it was the colour symbolism centring around the preference of white against *kaavi* (pale red) *kaavi* and white symbolising the mutts and *Sanyasins* and the householders respectively, Ramalinga was upholding the victory of the ordinary people in the war symbolised by the *kaavi* (p.321) White by itself

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45 Ibid., v.5816.
46 Ibid., v.5576.
47 Ibid., v.3767, 4177, 4726, 5595.
48 Ibid., v.3911.
49 Ibid., v.3905, 4128.

was no colour and it engulfed within itself all the colours. Those who had no special affinity for the worldly possessions preferred the white while those who could not overcome the temptations had to wear the *kaavi*, Ramalinga had explicitly made it clear that the mutts only perpetuated the *padha-madha* hegemony. He had preferred to be a *güru* (teacher) in white garb. That Ramalinga was a consciously motivated leader was evident from his use of the white colour symbolism, first to represent the British in *Manumurai Kanda Vaacagam* as the inauspicious 'white *errukku*' plant blossoming at the gates and finally to the purity, inclusiveness and domestic values.

That Ramalinga was not for any compromising approach was evident from his dropping of the Vedic attributes to the three institutions he had sponsored and simultaneously organising temple worship without the Brahmanical rituals and idols (p.435). He was also firm that to enter the sanctum sanctorum, [*garba graham*] one had only to be purer of heart and not higher by birth (p.436). Ramalinga had also made it clear that discrimination and segregation were anathema to worship (p.436). Through his prayers he had practically made people understand that religious practices must not be observed as rituals unintelligible to many and that they must inculcate in the people the love of their mother country, mother language and fellow human beings [*peru vinnappam* pp.450453]. For Ramalinga any salvation or redemption must only be

'this worldly' and should not remain isolated from the physique [*deha*]. God would not exercise his freedom of grace in favour of those exercising their *deha swathanthra,* (bodily privilege) *bhoga swathanthra* (privilege of wealth), and *jiva swathantra* (privilege of birth) (p.458). Also for him, the south was better placed with respect to spirituality than the north (p.450). Evidently Ramalinga advocated a non-Brahman spiritual uprising. The *Siddhas* were only heterodox but Ramalinga's critique was holistic and paradigmatic.

Though Ramalinga had to have a sense of frustration [*salippu*] (p.434) over the inimical developments at *Saalai*, he did not turn into a pessimist. He might have felt that it would be so with any mass organisation. He met the challenge organisationally with a membership drive (p.357) and member orientation on *Sanmargist* ethics. His directive to his disciples to bring people into the fold of the organisation at any cost marked a significant movement strategy. For the *sanga* to get enhanced of its vitality, Ramalinga thought that the *Sanmargists* should be oriented towards the ethic of *sanmarga.* He issued a four point charter of ethics for the *sanmargists* (p.348): (a) sensitivity to human sufferings and making interventions to remove them at any cost called as *Indiriya Ozhukkam*; (b)behavioural change of negating segregative and averse habits on the part of groups of individuals concerned called as *karana Ozhukkam:* (c)experiencing life in humanity or *jiva Ozhukkam* which

meant the negation, 'by all men and women', of all discriminations based on caste, creed, religion, stratum, sect, sub-sect, place and status and treating all as equals and as fellow humans; and (d)experiencing life in spirituality or *anma Ozhukkam* which meant the recognition of god in all the souls and identification of oneself in all of them.

Ramalinga was humble but not towards the disruptors of the *Saalai.* He firmly declared that those who attempted to disrupt the harmony either by offence or retaliation had to quit and that such acts would bring harm to both sides (p.434).

The ideal temple experiment having failed to generate momentum, Ramalinga finally took out the flag of the *sanga* and *sanmarga* movement making it clear that no idealist or utopian measure would ever succeed and what was actually needed was concrete practical action to conscientise the people. Many of his verses became slogans of the movement. Ramalinga had turned into a typical mass leader living amidst the 'noises' which were being raised "to train people in organisational discipline and to isolate the disruptors" (p.353). The chief component of Ramalinga's conscientisation mission was 'education for deathlessness' or *caagaadha kalvi* which meant the awareness to create the hungerless life on earth, [50] for Ramalinga had equated death by hunger with murder and *sanmarga* with deathlessness or *maranam illa peru vazhvu.*

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[50] Ibid., v.3678, 4615, 1567, 4891, 5061, 5387, 5517.

Ramalinga's final work was *Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam* (1867-1874) which remained unfinished when he disappeared.[51] This was his final word too. The work was the 'manifesto of the *Sanmarga* Movement'. The crux of the philosophy was that life on earth should be made livable, a beautiful human habitat unto the last. For Ramalinga, *jiva kaarunya* must ensure both 'this worldly [*apara*] and 'other worldly' [*para*] pleasure [*inbam*]. The first meant the fulfilment of the basic worldly needs for all and the second the clearance of the path for the evolution of the soul within the human body through the eradication of death by hunger. The first dealt with the natural desires of humanity and the second with the removal of the hurdle for the spiritual attainments. Having both the freedom and intellect to set right the dangers being encountered by the other humans, if one ignored it with neglect, one would, by the dictates of god, not only be disentitled to the freedom of attaining this worldly and *moksha* pleasures but would have to lose whatever freedom of possession and pleasure of access one currently enjoyed, and hence the goal of *jiva kaarunya* shall be to set right the dangers being encountered by the humans who had neither the required intellect nor freedom to do so by those who had it. [p. 92].

In the case of the humans suffering from want of clothing to wear, place to reside, land to cultivate, wife for union and the varied resource

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[51] *Tiru Arul Prakasa Vallalaar (a) Chidambaram Ramalinga Pillai, Jiva Kaarunya Ozhukkam,* ed.Krishnasamy Nayakar (Puducherry: Saba. Manikka Pillai Press, 1879).

endowments including money to carry out the job at will, *jiva kaarunya* must arise and ensure the above mentioned wants to carry out the job at will. Ramalinga charactrised them as the attainable worldly pleasures or *apara Inbam* (p.65).

To sum up, Ramalinga had shaped his movement strategies with a clear and holistic perspective and had finally emerged as a mass leader raising the flag with a programme that envisaged the emancipation of the oppressed people. He could identify and show to the people who were their friends and enemies and what would make the life on earth liveable. It would then be necessary to sum up the findings with a view to contextualising Ramalinga in the nineteenth century Tamil society. This would constitute the format of the concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION

St.Ramalinga's *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga* Movement has been studied with reference to the life-stages of the sponsor, his interaction with the contemporary society, the blossoming of his personality, his movement strategies and vision and mission in historical perspectives. Prima facie, one would be tempted to quote, and most fittingly so, Ramalinga himself to bear testimony to his own statement that if "one began to learn, placing faith in divine guidance, one could gain the wisdom attainable in thousand births in one second" [*upadesa kurippugal*, p.298]. One would only be bewildered to know that, in the context of the nineteenth century developments in Tamil Nadu, Ramalinga had made impact on such a vast area of human interaction characterised by modernity, intellectual pursuits, *bakthi* trait, spiritual quest, theology, philosophy, religious matters including conversion, cultural identity, temple and worship issues, gender issues, women's empowerment, emancipation of the weaker sections, family guidance and counselling, education including sex education, comparative religion, political economy, social conflicts and social change, movement dynamics, colonial hegemony, traditional medicine, poverty alleviation programmes, epigraphy, linguistics, renaissance and reformation, popular and elite prose, legal interactions, occupation ethics, discourses and debates, peasant study and communal harmony. Ramalinga would

deserve his legitimate place, on any count, in the nineteenth century Tamil history and society. In this concluding chapter the findings of the previous chapters would be critically summed up with a view to facilitating the conferment of the said status to St.Ramalinga.

Ramalinga had worked among the rural people and enjoyed popular support. He was not disturbed by any inimical trend. With his mass base he could even issue the warning to the detractors and disruptors. The identification of Ramalinga and the recognition accorded to his movement had arisen from the reciprocal need to appropriate that base for the respective twentieth century movement, besides using the leverage provided at the ideological level. Secondly the emergence of the non-Brahman classes as the rival or co-competitors of the Brahmans in education and employment from the close of the nineteenth century needed a non-Brahman platform, the foundation for which had already been laid by the *Sanmarga* movement with its unpretentious critique of the Brahmanical religion and Sanskrit hegemony. The 'Mutt' identity had lost its ground for the caste groupings and the non-Brahman cause which prophesied new 'power' had greatly immobilised the landed classes from parading against Ramalinga's movement. The spread of the nationalist ethos must also have contributed to the recognition of the relevance of Ramalinga. By the very same processes, Ramalinga's holistic paradigm suffered a tragic tumult as it remained fragmented in terms of

historical legacy, into two contending streams, the nationalist stream appropriating its anti-colonial framework with the subordination of the reform dynamic to the level of a supportive ideology for enriching the content of political independence and the 'self Respecter' stream taking the reform dynamic in its abstracted and metaphysical form to project anti-Sanskritism and anti-Brahmanism as the ultimate values with an apologia for the colonial rule.

The development of Tamil prose works in a predominant manner and in terms of practical utility in contemporary life in any language has been a reliable indicator of the social change towards modernity being witnessed by the people who participated in that change and reaped the benefits. The social change towards more inclusiveness in terms of access to education, socio-cultural participation, consumption and contribution to social product and sharing of development would be the basic criteria for the democratisation of language and its basic medium of communication. It was not due to the instant fascination that prose developed during the nineteenth century but as a corollary of changes in human interactions and interrelations, the behavioural patterns, aesthetics and value system caused by the emergence of the modern capitalist economy, though in its colonially modified form, from the pre-modern.

The missionaries first, the British officials aspiring to learn the native language, the text book society floated by them, their College of Fort St.George, the Madras School Book Society of the Directorate of Public Instruction and finally the Madras Standing Committee for Text Books – all paved the way for the creative writing of the text books in prose during the first half of the nineteenth century. The financial assistance offered inspired the Western educated Tamils to internalise modern knowledge through the improved grammatical premises of the mother tongue and enrich the latter with original modern works. This was the formative stage in the development of modern Tamil language and its prose. The missionary interest in conversion through education on the one hand and the British interest in the continuance in perpetuity on the other had formed the backdrop against the emergence of modern text books in prose. Evidently, the formative stage was the resultant of the interaction between two mutually attracting sectarian interests-the interests of the British to open a cultural dialogue with the natives for their colonial hegemony and those of the Western educated natives to make themselves fit for the opportunities which were available to them under the rule of the former. Both of them could co-exist at that level until the transformers seized the situation from the middle of the nineteenth century, to effect a qualitative change in the case of the

modernisors, and a leap forward in the case of St.Ramalinga, the revolutionary mass leader.

Through his movement experience and consequent strategy making, Ramalinga had arrived at the same point which had already been reached by him through life experience and consequent critiquing of the contemporary society. He could pierce through the empirical structures of a seemingly homogeneous society at its material and cultural-ideological levels and unearth the differentiation spectrum in the economic or material production sphere on the one hand and the polarisations of the sectional groupings in the cultural-ideological sphere on the other. Both were found to point to a three tyre class structure under the colonial dispensation. At the apex of the social ladder stood those who owned land, utilised the labour of others fully, monopolised religion, led a luxurious life, shared power with the rulers, enjoyed the fruits of modernisation, invoked the law for perpetrating their social and economic status and engineered the *padha-madha* hegemony. At the middle of the spectrum were those who were to labour for themselves and for the others, the second, type forming the majority, had small pieces of land which made agriculture mostly disadvantageous, grew indebted, were evicted from land and nomadised to settle as inferior citizens elsewhere, had the lower *sudra* status, possessed the tendency to aspire for and imitate the elite stratum, stringently observed the

customs and ceremonies, and fought on religion. At the bottom of the ladder were found those who had to struggle to live by expending their labour fully for others as the agricultural labourers, artisan, handicraftsmen and *lumpans* in urban centres, had a semi-servile status, remained denied of all luxuries, had no right to social product and no access to resource endowments, remained fossilised in terms of living conditions and were subjected to discrimination and social segregation. They worshipped the small deities.

The two way dialogue strategy adopted by Ramalinga to effect unity among two groups revealed his attempts to unify the mid stratum of the comparatively privileged small peasants with the underprivileged and landless agricultural labourers, artisans and handicraftsmen. The first or top stratum stood excluded, for Ramalinga had exposed the cruelties being committed by the landlords and moneylenders in unequivocal terms.

Though Ramalinga strived to effect unity between the small peasants and the landless, the base area of his movement was that of the former. That did not undermine the vigour of his concern for the latter as his directives against eating animal flesh and cremation were meant to eradicate the basis of segregation and ritual pollution.

By conferring the *saadhu* status to the *sudra* small peasants, training them to inquire into the truth of things and

phenomena and persuading them against eating animal flesh, Ramalinga should have attempted to secure *Sat Sudra* status for them while simultaneously persuading them to practice *jiva kaarunya* towards the underprivileged. This must have mobilised the wrath of the Brahmins, *Vellalas,* the Mutts and their representatives.

The first phase of the *Arutpa-Marutpa* controversy was only directed against the *Sanmarga* movement which threatened to question the *Padha Madha* hegemony, for the *Aaaram* [Sixth] *Tirumurai* of *Tiru Arutpa* had not been published by then. Instead of fighting with the popular movement, Arumuga Navalar had chosen to fight with the title of the work. The corroborative evidence was the opposition to Gopala Krishna Bharathi's *Nandhanaar Carittira Kirttanai* [1861] wherein the spokesmen of the landed classes and upper castes had chosen to fight the deviation from the literary tradition of *Periya Puraanam* rather than the agrarian content of the work centring around the plight of the *Nandhans* in contemporary society.

Ramalinga's conceptions of the coming of the *Perum Pathi* of *sanmarga* to raise the dead from their graves and bless them all were aimed at eradicating the basis of social segregation and pollution theories. He stood exposed to Christianity but did not turn into a Christian. He used the Christian concepts to the best advantage of the

movement he had sponsored, for which he was called a 'swindler' by Ochs.

At the religious level, Ramalinga's movement bore the message that the inter-religious dialogue could occur only on a secular platform and not against the backdrop of conversions.

Through *Saalai,* Ramalinga could tell the world that the humanitarian actions sponsored collectively to help the dispossessed in distress would help promote secular ethos among the sponsors themselves, cutting across caste and religion.

The pronouncement of ethics for the *Sanmargists* revealed Ramalinga's conviction that continued cadre orientation along the ideological perspectives alone would help strengthen a movement and face any crisis. Ramalinga had also shown that when a crisis arose in an organisation, the prime duty of the leadership was to discipline the movement with firmness and enlarge its membership.

Ramalinga had made it clear that raising the banner and slogans [*kuccal*] were crucial for taking an organisation to greater heights. Isolation of the disruptors was stressed.

Ramalinga, through his *sanmarga* movement and its model temple, *Sattiya Gnana Sabhai,* has raised the issue of the traditional temple serving as the nucleus of social stratifications, conflicts, segregations and discriminations. His alternate temple model had to be

closed by himself, but the issue has not remained closed. The failure had raised the issue of identifying the real polemic to resolve the problem on hand. A non-Vedic temple was no alternative to the Vedic temple when it was raised against the backdrop of the same socio-economic and political structures. Marx was clear when he stated that the alternative to religion was not atheism but the creation of meaningful social relations which did not necessitate religion.[1] That Ramalinga was aware of this fact was evident from the closing of the temple and re-stress on the *sanga* and *saalai.*

Ramalinga's movement at its climax had raised such an alarm among the opponents who were friends of the Mutts and landed classes and upper castes that they could not stand against the rising tides of *sanmarga* except seeking refuge under Tamil literary tradition. It was not quite surprising that the second phase of the *Arutpa-Marutpa* controversy could mobilise even great Tamil stalwarts on a single point agenda of the violation of Tamil tradition by Ramalinga.[2]

As the leader of a movement, Ramalinga's perception was unique, for it not only presented the immediate surrounding but the broader horizon of what constituted the surrounding as well. But the movement was a failure as the mobilisation could not be sustained on a permanent

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[1] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction" (1844) *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976).

[2] S.Amirthalingam, *Vallalaarin Alumai Uruvaakam,* op.cit., pp.196-215.

basis or in a long term sense, for it could not acquire stability in terms of concrete options for the classes mobilised. To understand the reason for the failure, one must trace the movement in its relation to the nature and content of capitalist development in India. Retarded and dependent capitalism had established its sway over the society by channelling the energies of the pre-capitalist forces and bringing into practice a partial complimentarity between the bourgeois-landlord classes and the colonial rulers. A powerful tool of domination over the people had arisen and, against this backdrop, the disruptions faced by the *Sanmarga* movement should be viewed as the activities of domination by the subjugation of the masses concerned. The masses of the peasantry largely remained un-integrated into the rising capitalist hegemony. This was a historical limitation. Coupled with this was the limitation on the part of the leadership to lift the mass uprisal up above localism and generalise them into a nation-wide anti-imperialist campaign. One would concur with Javeed Alam in concluding that "in the absence of independent class and mass organisation natural to its modes of struggle the peasantry remains deeply subjugated."[3] The formation of the 'All India Kissan Sabha' in 1936 had pointed to a significant historical development in this regard.[4]

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[3] Javeed Alam "Peasantry, Politics and Historiography: Critique of New Trend in Relation to Marxism", *Social Scientist*, No.117, Feb.1983, p.48.

[4] Harkishan Singh Surjeet, "Fifty years of Organised Peasant Movement", *The Marxist*, Vol.4, No.2, April.-June 1986, pp.26-88, B.T. Ranadive, India's Freedom Struggle, *Social Scientist*, No.159-160, Aug.-Sept.1986, pp.81-126.

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